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The Saints

SAINT FRANCIS OF SALES

SAINT FRANCIS OF SALES

BY

A. DE MARGERIE

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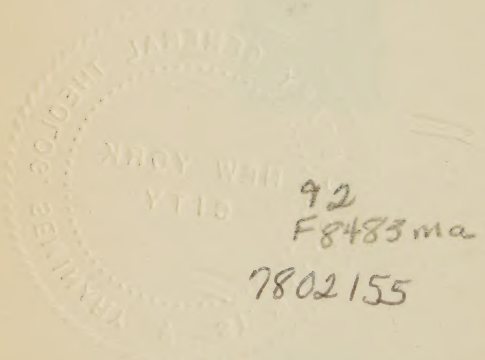
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SAINT FRANCIS OF SALES

CHAPTER I

THE LIFE OF SAINT FRANCIS

THE revival of Paganism in social manners, as well as in literature and sentiment, is the most flagrant characteristic of the great century to the latter half of which Francis of Sales belonged. But, by redeeming contrast, it was no less a century prolific in Catholic sanctity, in great foundations, in noble deeds, the period of a Christian Renascence, of the Church's conquests and triumphs, as well as of her disasters and losses. In the midst of the corrupt splendours of the Pagan Renascence the light of purity and justice shone with undimmed brilliance.

Nor must it be forgotten that the good the world saw proves the existence of a far greater sum of hidden good. The glorious harvest grew in rich soil, and what this soil was those versed in family documents of the period—a number that daily increases—can tell us. Research shows that even in the height of that scandalous age the weight of numbers is on the side of modesty, of noble example, of the kind of virtue we call antique, because it has a certain virile force which we associate with the heroes of Herodotus, Livy and Plutarch; a virtue

we also call patriarchal, because (as Fenelon would tell us) it has the attraction of a simplicity which seems properly to belong to the primitive ages, and which certainly is a striking contrast to the artificial complexities of modern life. But if we gave things their right names we should call it Christian virtue.

Rectitude, delicacy, cordiality, that noble quality we call honour, so often abused by the pretence when the reality is lost, fidelity to the marriage tie, love of country, solicitude for the moral and material estate of dependents; such were the principles that still flourished in many old-fashioned country mansions and town houses, fostering, by home discipline, the great religious vocations which proved so valuable to the Church in her time of peril. In one of these old world houses Francis of Sales was born.

I

He was born on the 21st August 1567 at the Chateau de Sales.

His father was François de Sales, Seigneur de Nouvelles. His mother—the only daughter of Melchior de Sionnaz, Seigneur de la Thuille and de Vallières—had inherited the Signory of Boisy from Philip Dérée, her first husband, and brought it as her dowry to Monsieur de Nouvelles on condition of his changing his name to de Boisy.

Monsieur and Madame de Boisy were as suitably matched in character as by distinction of birth. Brought up among soldiers, M. de Boisy had had plenty of experience in the license of camps and the

intrigues of courts. But his nature was loyal, honest, upright, and, thanks to his excellent common sense and still more to the regular practice of his religion, he had early formed his judgment of the so-called Reformation, on the ground of its origins, and had never wavered in his faith nor let himself be led astray by the sophisms of heresy. Mme. de Boisy, on her part, whilst confining her sphere of action to the government of her large household, was a model wife, a model Christian. Diligent in the exercise of her gentle rule, she watched over her servants that peace, order, morality, piety might reign among them, and fulfilled that beautiful ministry of charity which is the glorious tradition of the great Christian lady.

M. and Mme. de Boisy had been seven years married when Francis, their first child, was born. Mme. de Boisy was unable to nurse him herself, but, comprehending that a mother's mission is to form her children's souls and train them up to serve God, she left to no one the task of giving the little Francis his first religious instruction. Aided by a good priest, M. Déage, who afterwards was the child's tutor, she taught him his catechism herself, and not satisfied with the literal text, she added wise and loving explanations, adapted, as a mother knows how, to draw the child from his tenderest years to a devout love of holy things, and to impress upon his mind, at the most susceptible age, habits of obedience, generosity, compassion and respect for the poor, scorn of falsehood, filial fear towards God, and supreme love of Him.

M. de Boisy too thoroughly trusted his wife not to be quite satisfied to leave the education of their eldest son in her hands, but he did not so entirely divest himself of responsibility that he could not, when occasion required, interfere. Mme. de Swetchine says that a good Christian must also be a superlatively honest man. This also was M. de Boisy's opinion, and in regard to the homely virtue of common honesty he was inflexible. He had Francis one day well whipped, as children were in those days, because he had taken from a workman employed about the Chateau a silk shoulder knot that had attracted him by its gay colours. The little fellow was his own accuser, but his confession did not save him from the chastisement which was to make him remember his fault and teach him not to commit another of the same kind.

The lesson was evidently effectual, for the biographies of Francis have hardly any other charge to bring against him in a childhood singularly remarkable for winning sincerity, for charity and ingenuously expressed piety, and for simple zeal for the glory of God.

His studies began in his sixth year, at the College of la Roche, seven kilometres from the Chateau de Sales. At eight years old he went to the College of Annecy, where he was allowed to receive the tonsure; his father, who intended him for the magistrature and looked forward to a brilliant career for him, indulging him in what he thought a mere childish caprice, binding his son to nothing; but to Francis himself it was a serious step towards the sanctuary.

In the same spirit, it was at his own petition that, when he reached the age of thirteen and was to go to the University of Paris, he went to the College of Clermont, which was under Jesuit direction, in preference to the College of Navarre, which had the reputation of being rather worldly and dissipated, or as we should say in modern slang, *fast*—and where he feared his growing vocation might be endangered.

Francis was so successful in advanced literary studies and the various branches of philosophy that he was an honour to the University. But science, for its own sake, did not attract him. He valued it only for the sake of God, to Whom it leads, and for souls, because by knowledge he could enlighten them in the truth. In later years, when he was a bishop, we shall find him repaying his debt to science by founding, in a small town in Savoy, a miniature *Académie Française*, that, twenty years before Richelieu established his great foundation, was a centre of literary and scientific study in the heart of the Alps.

To please his father, Francis employed his leisure in learning how to ride, dance and fence, and became skilled in all these exercises, but his heart was in none of them. His resolution to give himself wholly to God grew stronger and stronger as, now in his studies, now in games and amusements, he succeeded in everything he attempted, and seemed to be fitting himself more and more to fill a brilliant place in the world. All the virtues most engaging in a young man, fervent piety, virginal purity, love

of the poor, zeal for souls, the humble self-distrust that is the safeguard of weakness, the retiring modesty that does not provoke enmity by success, the cordiality, the grace of manner that make virtue not only attractive but contagious, all these grew in him as his studies advanced. The grace of his vocation was also growing, and presently we shall find him at the feet of the Mother of God, binding himself by a solemn vow of perpetual chastity.

But no prudence, no vigilance ensures immunity from temptation, and Francis was no exception to the universal law of trial. Somewhere about his eighteenth year (the precise date is uncertain) he became troubled by an agonising temptation which might have led to tragical consequences. Loving God above all things and desiring only to love all other things in and for Him, his soul became darkened by the idea, vainly combated by his reasoning faculties, that he was an object of hatred to God and was doomed to hate Him to all eternity among the damned. This terrible idea pursued him everywhere, and in vain he tried to free himself from it by reading theological works and trying to follow the arguments of the most esteemed writers on predestination, especially St Thomas Aquinas. "In his anguish he seemed to be withering away: his face was pale, his cheeks haggard, his body was covered with jaundice and racked with pains; he could neither eat, drink nor sleep, and could hardly stand or walk on his tottering limbs."[1]

[1] *Vie de St F. de Sales*, par M. l'Abbe Hamon, Curé de St Sulpice. L. i., chap. iii.

To the frivolous and worldly, who despise the great realities of the future life and voluntarily live under the enchantment of transitory things, all this may seem ridiculous and contemptible. But Bossuet says, "No mental distress is a thing to be laughed at." And in this particular instance, the distress being that of a soul on fire with the love of God and plunged into the deepest misery by the idea of being condemned to hate Him, it was distress eminently worthy of compassion and respect.

The crisis was at last determined by no argument, no reasoning, but by an act of pure love, so heroic that we may trace the hand of God leading Francis through the valley of the shadows of death, simply that he might end by making such an act. "O Lord," he cried in one of the paroxysms of his grief, "if I am never to see you, this at least grant me: let me never curse or blaspheme you. If I may not love you in the other world—for in hell none praise you—let me at least take advantage of every instant of my brief existence here to love you as much as I can."[1]

As He waited for His servant Abraham when He commanded him to offer Him his son in sacrifice, so had God been waiting for Francis. His love, like the patriarch's obedience, had withstood the severest test, and he was now to receive consolation.

We read of him directly afterwards in the Church of St Etienne-des-Grès, before the statue mentioned above, reciting the *Memorare* with boundless con-

[1] *Vie de St F. de Sales*, par Ch. Auguste de Sales, son neveu, et son successeur au Siège de Genève.

fidence in the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, asking for peace of soul and health of body, and receiving both immediately; and more, for he rose from his knees, holier, more loving, more capable than before of consoling others in the trials of the spiritual life.

The education of the age was cosmopolitan, each several University having its distinct reputation for some particular study, and, attracted by the fame of Pancirola, a distinguished Professor, M. de Boisy sent his son to Padua. Francis was there more than four years, and, as in Paris, distinguished himself by his brilliant scholarship and virtuous life.

A certain group of his fellow students resented his orderly studious habits as a reproach to themselves and invented various ways of annoying him. At last they hit on the plan of lying in wait for him in a place he had to pass on his way to his lodgings, intending to spring out on him and maltreat him. He was gentle, humble, studious, and above all a *cleric*, and they counted on the fun of his being frightened and cowardly; but they counted without their host. Suspecting nothing, he was quietly walking home when the young bullies, springing out of their ambush, accosted him with threats and insults and were proceeding to personal violence when, taking advantage of his right of self-defence, the cleric, thanks to his training in self-defence, a skilful swordsman, defended himself to such purpose that he sent his cowardly assailants flying and then, sword in hand, he followed them till they cried for mercy.

There were no further acts of this kind of violence, but the next attack was more diabolical in its nature. One of those temptations which Holy Scripture tells us to deal with only by immediate flight was laid in his way with the fiendish intention of corrupting his innocence, but he escaped this snare also with a vigour and manly promptitude that left his adversaries confused.

Before he left Padua, he had an illness from which his physicians did not expect him to recover.[1] He was twenty-four when he finished his collegiate career, took his final degree and became a Doctor of Law. He passed his examinations with honour, and Pancirola, who presided, did all he could to invest the occasion with special dignity. When the result was announced he made a congratulatory speech, classical in form but cordial and Christian as well, and one that still retains its point. "I have looked forward to this day as among the most glorious of my life. You are about to be decorated

[1] He had already received the last Sacraments when his illness took a turn for the better. He was calmly waiting for death, fortifying himself by the words of Holy Scripture. He drew up some instructions to be carried out after his death, and among them one of a remarkable character. "I have just one particular favour to ask you," he said to his tutor, M. Déage: "When I am dead, please give my body to the medical students to dissect." "What," cried M. Déage, "such a thing would be disrespectful to your family." "Forgive me for not yielding the point," was the answer, "but it would be a comfort when I am dying to think that I, who have been a profitless servant in my life, will be of some use when I am dead by providing them with a subject to work upon, which they have neither quarrelled nor committed murder to obtain."

with the insignia of the Doctorate, and I rejoice that on me has fallen the office of performing the ceremony. Others would have performed it with more honour to the University, none with greater affection for yourself, an affection inspired by your virtues which are on a par with your science, by the goodness of your heart which is as pure as your intellect is clear. To love virtue and not love you would be impossible. Humane, charitable, and so compassionate that, at the gate of the tomb, you bequeathed your body to purposes of public utility, you have been even more eminent for your chastity —a chastity that has been safeguarded by your sincere piety. Like the Fountain of Arethusa, which mingles its waters with the salt sea without losing its sweetness, you have lived in the midst of a voluptuous city and preserved your innocence. Finally, in you a sincere horror of all that is evil, the habitual practice of all that is good, are associated, with noble and generous sentiments, with solid piety; and it is these virtues which Heaven to-day rewards by the honours you are to receive."

The youthful Doctor was triumphantly received at the Chateau de Sales. The feelings, both Christian and purely human, of the parents of such a son, handsome, graceful in person and manner, brilliant yet serious, learned, religious, matured in character but submissive as a little child, can be better imagined than described. In such a son, M. de Boisy saw the realisation of his fondest dreams; a son who would perpetuate his race and cover his family with fresh honours, and that he should settle down

at once and marry became now his father's most pressing anxiety. The first step was to hand over to him the Signory of Villaroget with the title belonging to it; the next to send him to Chambéry to pass the examination that would qualify him to the title of Advocate of the Senate of Savoy. As usual he passed brilliantly. His father next took him to visit a neighbouring chateau, to introduce him to a young lady whom he thought worthy of his paragon of a son. She was a charming girl, the daughter of one of M. de Boisy's friends, well-born, rich and beautiful; but Francis' manner, that of a finished gentleman, on that and later occasions, made it impossible to suppose he came as a suitor, and the matter in course of time died a natural death, to M. de Boisy's disappointment and surprise.

But he was more surprised still when, for no reason that he could imagine, his son declined to be made one of the Senators of Savoy, a dignity spontaneously offered and an extraordinary honour to so young a man. The secret motive of the refusal Francis had confided, so far, only to his mother, his tutor, his cousin Canon Louis de Sales, his younger brother (another Louis), and finally to Antoine Favre, an excellent Christian with whom he had formed an acquaintance at Chambéry that was afterwards to ripen into a lasting friendship. One other person suspected what the future had in store for him. With a parent's legitimate pride Monsieur de Boisy had introduced his eldest son to the Bishop of Geneva, Claude de Granier, and very soon afterwards the good bishop said to certain members of

his household: "What do you think of that young man? I tell you he will be a great personage some day, a column of the Church. He will succeed me in this See."

An explanation with M. de Boisy was inevitable sooner or later; but all shrank from giving him pain, and dreaded for him the terrible struggle he would have to make before the Christian triumphed over the natural man and he was able to resign himself to renounce his plans for his beloved son, all the hopes and well-founded expectations that centred in him.

A vacancy that happened to occur in the diocesan Chapter suggested to Canon Louis de Sales an ingenious way of at least softening the blow. The provost, or as it now would be called the dean, died, and the canon, in concert with the bishop, at once applied to Rome to have the vacant office—a very important one—filled by his young kinsman. Meantime Francis himself was not let into the secret, and when a favourable answer came from Rome and the mystery was revealed, he was almost incredulous. The suddenness of this promotion to such serious functions was at first only a shock to his humility; but, on reflection, he felt that, irresponsible as he was personally for the application, the result was an indication of the Will of God, and that the consolatory news he could now offer his father when he asked him to make his great sacrifice would probably help to overcome his opposition.

The scene that followed was what might have been expected. M. de Boisy, sincerely anxious for his

son's happiness, could not see that anyone but himself had a right to decide how that happiness was to be secured. He intended his eldest son to carry on the family, and here was a contradictory vocation interfering with his plans. Like many good fathers, excellent Christians up to a certain point, but addicted to their own way, he did not see that anyone, were it God Himself, ought to come between his authority as a parent and his son's submission as a son. He would not have put the case in this form, but practically he was convinced that his authority was final.

The son with whom he had to deal was, however, so gentle, so patient, so respectful, yet so persuasive, that, conquered at last, he accused himself of having tried to fight against God. "My son," he said, "as you tell me this resolve comes from God, I will take your word for it. Obey Him. Who am I to resist Him?" Then, his eyes full of tears, he blessed his son, who knelt at his feet also overcome by emotion. But the sacrifice had cost M. de Boisy so dear that for days afterwards he was ill enough to cause his family some anxiety.

Francis had been doubly prepared for the priesthood by a life of almost sacerdotal holiness and by deep theological studies, both in Paris and Padua, under teachers who saw in his proficiency only a singular aptitude for philosophical and legal science. In his case there was, therefore, no difficulty in shortening the usual delays. Only three weeks after his father gave his consent he received minor orders, four days later he was ordained sub-deacon, three

months later deacon, and in another three priest. In his Retreat, preparatory to his ordination as priest, he formed certain resolutions that he kept all his life. One of these was to "make every moment of the day a preparation for to-morrow's mass, in such manner that should anyone ask me, 'What are you doing at this moment?' I may be able to answer *truly*, 'Preparing to celebrate Mass.'" It would be impossible to give a better clue to the mystery of his soul's life than is contained in these illuminatory words. They reveal all the secret of his interior life; of his recollected exterior serenity, no matter how beset he was with business; they explain the harmonious perfection of that unbroken spiritual progress which continued till the hour of his death.

He entered on the duties of his sacerdotal life with an almost passionate zeal which never abated. He visited the poor, comforted the sick, spent himself ungrudgingly in the Confessional, especially in the service of the poorest, the most repulsively dirty, ragged beggars; while his patience with the scrupulous was inexhaustible. His sermons alone were enough to have filled his life had he not had an almost miraculous gift for multiplying his time. From every quarter invitations to preach poured in, and, as little careful to husband his physical strength as to raise the value of his oratory by doling it out stingily, he never refused. On this subject he used to tell a delightful anecdote, interesting also in connection with the influence his simple evangelical style of preaching had on the Christian oratory of the period.

"I had the best of fathers, but he had spent a great deal of his life in courts and on battle-fields and he knew more about their maxims than those of theology. While I was provost I was always preaching either at the cathedral or some parish church or perhaps for some little confraternity. I could never refuse, because I so loved those words of Our Lord, 'Give and it shall be given to you.' My dear father, when he heard the bell ring, would ask who was going to preach to-day, and the answer would be: 'Why, who should it be but your son?' So one day he took me apart and he said to me, 'Provost, you preach too much, I hear the bell going for sermons even on working days, and I am always told it is the Provost, the Provost. Now in my time there was nothing of this kind, sermons were not so common, and when there was one, it *was* a sermon! God knows the study they must have cost the preacher to get them up. Those were grand sermons! Why, there was as much Greek and Latin in one of them as in ten of yours! That was the kind of sermon the people liked and that edified them! They used to come in crowds to hear them, just as if they were going to gather manna. But you, you make your sermons so common that no one thinks anything of them, and, for the matter of that, not so much of you as they ought!'"

But this reasoning did not convince Francis, excellent scholar as he was, that in order to convert souls he must fill his sermons with Greek and Latin, still less was he likely to be influenced by

the idea of being thought much of. As before, he continued not to spare himself, and, all unconsciously, was preparing himself, among a people simple in faith and habits, for the very different kind of ministry of the Word of God that was to follow. Annecy was the noviciate for the Chablais, the security of one, the apprenticeship for the risks and dangers of the other.

II

The Chablais, a province of Savoy on the south (now the French) shore of the Lake of Geneva, extends from Hermance on the west, to St Gingolph on the east, and is an agglomeration of mountains crowding one above the other. It remained uninfected by heresy until 1535, when the Bernese Protestants invaded and took the western part of it as well as the two other Savoyard provinces, the Pays de Vaud and the Pays de Gex.

The pretext for this invasion was the defence of Geneva; the opportunity was the defenceless state of the districts (the Duke of Savoy's army was occupied in defending Piedmont against Francis I.); the motives were political ambition and sectarian fanaticism.

Protestantism was propagated in the conquered provinces by force of arms; Catholic worship was forbidden; priests who refused to apostatise were expelled; religious orders were suppressed; ecclesiastical property was confiscated; the churches were

either torn down or converted to Protestant use; ministers were substituted for the parochial clergy.

Nor was the situation ameliorated even when (1564) Philibert Emmanuel obtained the restitution of the Chablais and Gex by the cession of all his claims to Vaud; for the compromise was effected only on the condition that the interdict on Catholic worship should remain in force in the restored provinces.

In 1589 the Bernese, taking advantage of a quarrel between Henri III. and a new Duke of Savoy, Charles Emmanuel, again invaded the Chablais, bringing with them havoc and desolation. But this time they were successfully repulsed, and, at Nyon, were bound over by treaty to restore Catholic liberties and to confine Protestant worship to three towns. This treaty was soon broken, and first by the Bernese. They attacked Gex in concert with the Genevans, and thus absolved the Duke from the engagements taken on his side. Hostilities were carried on after this until 1593, when the aggressors, finding that the abjuration of Henri IV. had cut the ground from under their feet, sued for peace. A truce followed, which left the fate of Gex in abeyance but gave the Duke of Savoy sole and undivided control of the Chablais.

Immediately after the suspension of hostilities, he saw that, not only as a Catholic prince but in the interests of public security, it was his most pressing duty to further the return of the population to the faith of their forefathers, of which

they had been so unjustifiably robbed by violence half a century before. He lost no time, therefore, in asking the Bishop of Geneva to send missioners, and in consequence of this application a pious ecclesiastic was speedily despatched to Thonon, the capital of the Chablais, invested with the title and faculties of parish priest. This first mission proved eminently unsuccessful. The heretical burghers rose in arms, summoned military aid from Berne and Geneva, destroyed the castle commanding the town, and then forced the priest to withdraw.

The mission had been barren of results, but, undeterred by this first check, the saintly bishop neither despaired nor for a moment thought of abandoning his rebellious but beloved sheep to their fate. He first sought light in fervent prayer, then called a council, composed of his canons and other leading ecclesiastics, and, setting the case before them in all its gravity and peril, he asked them for their advice in noble words that inspired them with his own courage. "The toil will be arduous," he told them, "the danger such that it might make the stoutest heart quail. But if every day men brave the storms and perils of the ocean, attracted by the bait of earthly gain, and are not kept back by the knowledge that toil and danger lie before them, should the ministers of Jesus Christ, whose aims are so incomparably higher—I speak of the interests of God's glory and of the salvation of souls—be cowardly enough to hold back because of risks and obstacles? No! I think too well of my clergy to

doubt for a moment that I shall find among them brave men ready to devote themselves to the conversion of these heretics. Courage will not be enough, I know, for success in this difficult and delicate task; it requires qualities that rarely are met in combination. It was for this reason I asked you to meet me here, that you might enlighten me by your advice, and that I might ask you where you think I ought to look for the goodwill and the talents required for the worthy fulfilment of this mission."

By the rules of precedence it was the Provost who spoke next. He rose and said simply: "Monseigneur, if you think I am capable of this mission and order me to undertake it, I am ready to obey, and shall be happy in being chosen: *in verbo tuo laxabo rete.*"

This was just what the bishop had expected him to say, and he not only accepted Francis as one of the missionary band, but, on the spot, made him head of it. "Had you held back," he said to him, "I should have felt constrained, in spite of ill-health and a weakened constitution, to take the burden upon myself. I thank you for relieving me."[1]

Francis was now much in the same position, as regarded his father's consent, as when called to the priesthood. A junior officer, whose general has put him under orders, is not bound to consult his parents before he obeys, and M. de Boisy, who would unhesitatingly have marched to the cannon's mouth, or let any member of his family do the same, to serve his king or in obedience to the precepts of military

[1] *Vie de St F. de Sales*, par Ch. Aug. de Sales.

honour, had not the same respect for the heroism and honour of an apostolate.

Directly the news came to the Chateau de Sales, he ordered his horse and hurried to Annecy to put a stop to what he called "this madness." He went first to his son, intending to carry matters with a high hand. But he found that, although he could without difficulty inflict great pain on his son's tender, filial heart, he could not shake him in his devoted resolution. All he could do was to make him come with him to the bishop, on whose affection for himself M. de Boisy knew he could rely. "Was this," he asked, kneeling at the feet of his bishop, "his reward for sacrificing his first-born, the son whom he expected to carry on the traditions of his race and be the prop of his old age? Was it that he might be sent so soon to die a martyr? I will not consent," he said, using rather mixed metaphors, "to his being sent like a victim to the slaughter, to be torn to pieces by wolves."

The bishop, touched by his distress, held his tongue, while Francis gently but firmly reminded him again of the sacred character of his unqualified engagements to serve the Church. M. de Boisy only insisted the more. At last Mgr. de Granier seemed to be on the point of yielding. "Be firm, Monsigneur," cried the young apostle. "What! would you make me unfit for the kingdom of God? I have put my hand to the plough, would you have me look back for any human consideration?"

Reminded of his austere duty the bishop now spoke and put before M. de Boisy all the arguments

best calculated to touch the heart of a Christian parent, and finally he reminded him that, satisfied with the patriarch's submission, God had not required him to sacrifice Isaac's life. "I don't mean to resist the Will of God," said the old soldier at last, "but all the same I don't wish to be my son's murderer, and I am not worthy that God should send an angel to ward off the blow that would make my Isaac a sacrifice. That's my reason for refusing to consent to this immolation, and refuse it I do, so far as in me lies. For the rest, may God do what best pleases Him."

In these final words Francis thought he detected signs of yielding, and, kneeling at his father's feet, he implored him not to refuse him his blessing. "My son," answered M. de Boisy, "I have often received your blessing, in the Holy Mass, in the Confessional and when you were preaching—God forbid I should ever curse you either soul or body; but of this be sure, you will get neither blessing nor consent out of me for this undertaking." And he stuck to his word, even when one of his very great friends, whom he had commissioned to try his hand at bringing Francis round to a better mind, came back, won over to the cause he had gone out to oppose, and very anxious to persuade M. de Boisy to see it in the same light.

The chalice of bitter disappointment was the stirrup cup that was held to the young missionary's lips, for he left without his father's blessing. Before we start with him for the Chablais let us first return to that father, but not as we have just seen him

displaying a degree of human weakness, not to say obstinacy, which rather dims the lustre of his affection for his son. Seven years have passed, and M. de Boisy is seventy-nine and on his death-bed. Francis, now Bishop-coadjutor of Geneva, is preaching the Lent Station at Annecy. But news comes from the Chateau de Sales that his father is dangerously ill and he goes to him; hears him make a general confession, and gives him Holy Communion several times. M. de Boisy sees his son's vocation in another light now, and blesses God with all his soul for giving him such a guide, such a comforter to help him in his passage to eternity.

But duty, his engagements, call Francis back to his post; the doctors think M. de Boisy will last till Easter, and father and son agree meantime to part. But the calculation fails and suddenly M. de Boisy becomes much worse, too suddenly to summon the Bishop-coadjutor, and he receives the last Sacraments from other hands. Then the old soldier, weak and trembling but the spirit of his profession still alive in him, notices that his family are weeping round his bed, and he calls for his son Gallois. "My son," he says, "you are a soldier as I was. Send all these crying women away. Lift me up, give me my arms. A soldier, who has braved death on battle-fields, must not die in bed surrounded by weeping women."

It was the expiring spark of human pride. A moment later the humility of the Christian prevailed, and the veteran's last hours were spent in

acts of union with God and in loving contemplation of the crucifix, which he repeatedly kissed.

When he felt the end was very near, he called for all his children and blessed them. His last words were to commend their mother, the dear companion of his life, as his legacy to them. Then he spoke to them of their eldest brother, whom he once had grudged to give to God, telling them always to obey him as their father, always to be guided by him.

And this was the reparation he made to Francis for refusing seven years before to bless him.

III

It was on the 14th September, the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, 1594, that Francis and his cousin, the canon, set out on foot, without servants and almost without money, for the Chablais. They spent the night at the Chateau des Allinges, where, to avoid courting risk, they were to take up their quarters during the mission. It was garrisoned, in the Duke of Savoy's interests, by Catholic soldiers, under the command of the Baron d'Hermance.

Next day the two missionaries visited Thonon, which was some six or seven miles away. Here the first thing they did was to call on the tax-gatherer, a man on whom they knew they could rely, and at his house they found the whole Catholic flock, numbering fifteen persons, gathered for inspection. They were a frightened band, but the missionaries counted on them as the nucleus that was to develope, and they exhorted them to be

courageous in persevering in the practice of their religion.

The missionaries began their work by preaching at Thonon, the capital of the Chablais, extending their efforts to other places as they could. But their words came back to them void. The Protestants did not come to hear their sermons because the ministers were on the watch to prevent it, and had, besides, taught the people to believe all sorts of lies about the priests. But in spite of calumny and all the threatening rumours that soon filled the air the work was quietly continued, the little band of apostles finding the walk to and from Allinges a great additional fatigue.

Winter came, and an unusually hard one. The whole land was white with snow and infested by roaming packs of wolves. One night, Francis, in imminent danger of being torn to pieces, only escaped by climbing a tree. He did not venture to come down until it was daylight, and then was in such an exhausted condition from cold that but for some Calvinist peasants who found him, took him into their home and gave him restoratives, he must have perished. He rewarded these good people by sowing in their souls seed that ripened afterwards in conversion.

But wolves were neither the only nor the most serious danger. On the 8th January 1595 a Protestant, who had sworn he would take the life of Francis, tried thrice in succession to shoot him as he passed the hiding-place where he lay in wait for him. Each time the gun missed fire. Then the

same man employed other assassins to do the deed, but Francis walked past them and they did not see him. This story was related on oath by the would-be murderer himself, who was afterwards converted, and gave his evidence at the process of beatification.

Time advanced, but nothing else. Humanly speaking, there seemed not the slightest use in continuing the mission, and M. de Boisy wrote imperatively as well as entreatingly: "Monsieur, my son," he said, "I have nothing but praise for your zeal, but what the good of it is I can't see. You have done more than enough by this time to prove it and everyone who has any common sense or prudence is beginning to say that your perseverance is becoming sheer obstinacy, and that to go on exposing your constitution to these hardships is tempting Providence. The long and the short of the matter is, that people of that kind can only be taught at the cannon's mouth to receive the Faith. I conjure you, therefore, to put an end to my fears and anxieties for you, and to come back to your family, who all long for you, especially your mother, who is heartbroken because you stay away, and, still more, because she does not expect you ever to come back alive. If my entreaties have no effect upon you, I order you as your father to return without delay."

Francis did not enter into any arguments in his reply; he simply referred his father respectfully to the bishop, who had appointed him to the mission and could alone withdraw him from it. Just about the same time he wrote to one of his friends with

whom he could venture to be more confidential: "I am only just at the beginning of my work, and I want to go on with it and hope in God against all human hopes." [1]

But the practical question of how to conduct the mission to any purpose still remained to be answered, and finding that the people would not come to hear what he had to say, he determined to try and make them read what he wrote. Day by day, at odd moments when he might have snatched some rest, he drew up little papers on the chief points in debate between Catholics and Protestants. Each of these leaflets as he finished it was numerously copied by hand and distributed, either in the street or slipped under doorways or pasted to walls.

But, meantime, it was among Catholics, not Protestants, that he reaped the first fruits of his apostolate. While waiting for his unspoken sermons to leaven the Protestant population, he laboured with such zeal among the soldiers in the Chateau des Allinges that from the dissolute, violent crew he had found there, they were transformed into Christians worthy of the name.

Seven months passed and as yet only three or four Calvinists had come for instruction, and even these at wide intervals. The missionary and his sermons were, in fact, left "severely alone"; and that he might make no mistake as to the uselessness of continuing at Thonon, the chief persons in the town entered into a mutual compact not to attend his sermons. But, not in the

[1] *Déposition de la Mère Chaugy.*

least disconcerted, Francis only cheerfully remarked: "Fruits that ripen late keep better than those which ripen early. It might be a pity if someone whose labour would be more productive elsewhere spent his time doing nothing here, but I am good for nothing yet but to preach to bare walls, and I have those here."[1]

On July 1st, 1595, he went up the mountain of the Voirons to replace an oratory, dedicated to Our Blessed Lady, that the Bernese had pulled down. A hostile crowd followed him; he was insulted and struck, escaping further ill-treatment only by a kind of miracle. This foretaste of martyrdom gave him new courage, and was, in fact, followed by a turn in the tide.

Very soon afterwards the enemy's ranks began to show signs of wavering. The tracts had done their silent work. The missionary's gentle intrepidity, too, had provoked admiration, and enlisted sympathy and the surprise that he should be so persistent became at last curiosity to hear what it was he was so determined to say. Some of the townspeople broke their compact and ventured to go and hear him preach; his sermons impressed them, and others were induced to follow their example and go too. Conversions, of which there had only been nine or ten before in as many months, became much more frequent.[2]

[1] Letter to a religious, 7th April 1595.

[2] Among these early conversions, that of M. Poncet deserves special notice. A learned lawyer, directly he was convinced, he openly made his abjuration at a time when such step entailed the most serious consequences to his worldly interests.

The Calvinist ministers now evidently began to think that theirs was a losing cause, for they resorted to desperate measures. First, they said Francis was a magician and owed his beguiling speech to his ally the devil. Next, that he must be got rid of.

One evening when he had been preaching with great effect on the invocation of the Saints, two men, with naked swords in their hands, sprang out on him as he was returning to the Chateau des Allinges.

Roland—the young servant M. de Boisy had, on his own responsibility, sent after his son—and two other men were with him, and all three tried to put themselves between him and his assailants. But, pushing them aside, Francis calmly confronted the assassins, who were so disconcerted by his quiet courage that, instead of attacking him again, they listened to the gentle words he spoke to them, and finally fell at his feet and asked him to forgive them.

Next day Baron d'Hermance urged him not to leave Allinges without an escort; but he would hear of nothing of the kind. The matter would probably have ended there but for Roland, who wrote his own highly-coloured account of the adventure to M. de Boisy. This proceeding brought on Francis more urgent orders than ever from his father to come back at once. But it was the old soldier's last attempt to make his son desert his post. "Monsieur and my very honoured father," wrote Francis in reply, "were Roland your son instead of only your servant, he neither would be so

cowardly as to want to beat a retreat because of the little check we have had, nor would he magnify it into a battle. It is no doubt true that the heretics are angry with us, but no one has the right to doubt our courage. I ask you, therefore, not to attribute to obstinacy my persevering."[1]

This letter disarmed his father, who understood at last that Francis too was a soldier, and in his place on the field of battle.

In the month of March Francis finally left the Chateau des Allinges, and, to be in the heart of his work, took up his abode at Thonon, in the house of a devout lady, a friend of the de Sales family. Personally he ran much greater risk here than at Thonon, but this consideration was not one to weigh with him. The house was, in fact, entered one night and searched from top to bottom, his room included, but again Francis was not found.

But the harvest was beginning to ripen. Individual converts might still have so much to bear that some preferred expatriation, but the reflux into the Church was a strong, steady current. To Senator Favre, Francis now could write: "A field vaster, less desolate, opens before us."

It was the time for a decisive movement. The people no longer kept their ears persistently closed to the truth; they must have an opportunity now of judging for themselves between the Church and heresy. This opportunity they had in a sermon which Francis announced his intention of preaching, and in which he undertook to prove the truth

[1] *Vie de St F. de Sales*, par Ch. Aug. de Sales.

of the Catholic Faith from Scripture, on evidence to which the opposite side would have to submit. The challenge was meant for the ministers of the Chablais and Vaud, and put them into an awkward predicament; for to refuse to encounter him was a tacit confession of conscious weakness that could not fail to be detrimental to their influence.

Fondly hoping to overwhelm him by numbers, they asked him to hold a conference at which he was to appear singly before them all. His alacrity in accepting this invitation rather alarmed them, and they held a preliminary meeting to fix their plan of action and draw up a confession of faith in which they could all agree. Needless to say this agreement proved elusive, and the matter would have ended then and there but for the Seigneur d'Avully, the leading Protestant in Thonon.

By dint of pressure this gentleman managed to have a day fixed, but when it came only one solitary minister put in an appearance, and he only to say that, until the Duke's authorisation was obtained the meeting would not take place. This Francis volunteered to arrange, and in a few days he returned with the authorisation. But, as before, his opponents were conspicuous only by their absence.

These evasions were disastrous to the cause. Many of the Calvinists had honestly expected enlightenment on controverted points from the public conference, and disappointed in this they now sought private interviews with the Catholic priest. Of this number was M. d'Avully. After many vain attempts to stir up the Bernese and Genevan ministers to

some reasonable refutation of the Catholic position he made up his mind at last to become a Catholic, and on the 4th October 1596, courageously made a public abjuration.

This event gave the movement an impetus which enabled Francis to carry his operations into Geneva, the citadel of Protestantism. Accompanied by the new convert, M. d'Avully, he went there to confront La Faye, a minister who had boasted at Thonon of his ability to confute all the Catholic Priest's arguments, and then had discreetly beaten a retreat to Geneva. Brought to bay by this move La Faye could do nothing now but accept the challenge, and a public meeting took place between the opponents on the Place du Molard. The debate lasted three hours, Francis cool and imperturbable all the time. The minister ended the discussion with a volley of abuse as his final argument.

It would be impossible, within the limits of this study of the life and character of St Francis of Sales, to give any detailed account of the trials of every description, insults, threats, violence, deadly perils through which he pursued the superhuman work of his untiring apostolate, or of the means he adopted, first to attract the help of fellow labourers, and—as the number of conversions made it practicable — to effect the restoration of solemn public worship in the parish churches of the Chablais. Let it suffice to say that nothing was wanting to his trials; even his own colleagues tried him by contradiction. Of harsher mould than he was, they disapproved his methods and reproached him, first

personally, then to Mgr. de Granier, with hindering the progress of the mission by his perpetual gentleness.

"He does more harm," they complained, "in a single day than we can undo in a month. He preaches to the heretics more as if he were one of their own ministers than like a priest, even so far forgetting himself as to call them *his brethren;* a scandal they lay hold of and triumph in, and they come flocking to listen to his honeyed words that flatter their ears, and to his talk of *fraternity*."

The bishop took no more notice of their criticisms than they deserved, and Francis himself answered them with the same gentleness his Catholic colleagues found so reprehensible in his dealings with heretics: "I have never allowed myself to give way to invective or reproach without repenting it; and if I have had the happiness of reclaiming heretics, it has been by gentleness. Love is a stronger power over souls—I do not only say than severity — but than any reasoning."

He had good reasons for saying this. Self-devotion, love, "bearing all things," and at the same time active, holiness made irresistibly attractive by the charm of amiability, were the secrets of his successful mission. Only three years before, had the bishop of the diocese come to the Chablais, he would have found himself in a hostile country; but when he came now to see for himself what fruits the mission had produced, he was welcomed as a father among his children. He gave the sacrament of confirmation at Thonon, and was present at the Forty

Hours' devotion. During this visit news came that the Duke of Savoy was coming too, to assist at a repetition of the Forty Hours. But this was not the duke's only purpose in visiting Thonon. The greatest consternation was created by the announcement that he was also coming to punish the Protestants for offences committed in 1594. Four years had elapsed since then, but the ruined state of the ducal castle was still an irritating monument of the Protestant disloyalty that had given the Genevese and Bernese access to the town.

In the face of this insulting evidence of their crime, the guilty party had no courage to approach the duke to plead their own cause, and in their extremity they went to the bishop to ask him to intercede. The rôle of *Defensor civitatis*, once a recognised Episcopal function, was one Mgr. de Granier had no hesitation in accepting, and, accompanied by his provost, he put himself at the head of the suppliant consistory, and went out to meet the duke when he made his solemn entry into the town. An old man, he knelt before the duke and told him he waited for his assurance of pardon before he would rise, and, taken utterly by surprise and moved by this touching scene, the duke gave the promise asked for. This incident was the auspicious prelude to a large number of conversions.

But the time was now at hand when Francis was to be withdrawn from the mission, and the duke, both as a Christian and as a secular prince, felt himself bound to make provision against contingencies that might follow his departure. The great majority

of the people had indeed returned to the unity of the Faith, but past experiences of Protestant modes of warfare, of the lies, calumnies, seditions, violence, murderous plots they did not scruple to employ as weapons, had taught the duke that to leave the work Francis had accomplished at so great a cost, defenceless and at the mercy of all these risks, would be reckless imprudence. As a secular prince he had every reason to erect safeguards that would prevent his remaining Protestant subjects in the Chablais from courting and abetting his exterior enemies. In no other state under his government, was any religion but the Catholic recognised by law; and on the other hand, in every state governed by Protestant princes, the Catholic religion was cruelly proscribed. It has been already explained that the Duke of Savoy, as one contracting party to the Treaty of Nyon, had been emancipated from his engagements, the other contracting party (*i.e.* the Protestants) having violated theirs. Availing himself of this emancipation, and following the precedents established in other European countries, and the rules of all contemporary law, he made up his mind to put the Church on the same footing in the Chablais as in every other state under his government. She was to enjoy all her former rights, resume her old position, and the Catholic religion was again to be exclusively recognised as the only national religion. His answer to the Protestant emissaries who came from Berne and Geneva to claim freedom of worship for their co-religionists, was this: "When you seized this province you forced the people to

embrace your novel opinions; and now that I have recovered the province by the right of arms, and when my people almost universally bear witness to their desire that I should restore the old, the true religion, you must permit me, if I choose, to regulate religious matters according to my people's will. As for your request that I will allow at least three ministers to remain in the Chablais, I consent on condition that you will allow me to send such priests as I choose to Berne."

The restitution of all churches and of all ecclesiastical property to the diocesan clergy, followed. Protestant worship was interdicted, the possession or circulation of Protestant books was forbidden, ministers were expelled, leading Protestants who refused to attend Catholic sermons were given the alternative of putting themselves under instruction, or of leaving the country within a given date, but the bulk of the Protestant population was no further interfered with.

In all these measures Francis acquiesced; and more, he recommended them. Their scope was limited to the restoration of the old order and the obliteration of all traces of a foreign occupation. They were justified by law and experience, and were mildness itself when compared with the enormities of violence perpetrated on the other side, when a peaceful people, content in the religion of their forefathers, had been forced into apostacy. They were measures, moreover, that were especially welcome to a large number of not very valiant souls, convinced of the truth of

the Catholic Faith, but afraid, after having witnessed the persecuted lives led by converts during the late mission, to declare their convictions until they could be sure of the ground under their feet. Finally, without the reorganisation of the ecclesiastical system, in other words, without the restoration of those facilities of access to the ministers of God and to sermons, which are so essential to Catholic life, the mission would have been incomplete.

The measures adopted led to no disturbing results, and proved so effectual, that a few years later Francis could say: "When we arrived, there were not more than fifteen Catholics left in the Chablais, and now there are not more than fifteen Calvinists.

IV

The Bishop of Geneva, who was advancing in years, had all this time been studying the Apostle of the Chablais (his "son," as he fondly called him) in the light of a coadjutor and successor. Francis had suspected no such designs, and heard of them with incredulity at first, then with an overwhelming distress that shook him to the very depths of his being.

On the one hand, humility prompted the refusal of the weighty responsibilities of the Episcopate; on the other, he was afraid of refusing work which God might intend him to do. But at last, accepting the bishop's persistency as an indication of the Divine Will, he yielded, and, from that moment, without a reserve.

Directly the decision was made he began to prepare for going to Rome, where Mgr. de Granier was sending him to act for him in some diocesan interests. The Abbé de Chissé, the bishop's nephew, was to go also to make final arrangements about the coadjutorship.

But in the midst of these plans, and of the general satisfaction in the bishop's choice of a successor, Francis fell ill, and so ill that for a time it seemed that, having made his sacrifice, he was to receive his eternal reward without further delay.

It was Madame de Boisy who tenderly told her son that his doctors thought his case a hopeless one. Then followed one of those struggles which have taken place in the lives of many other saints at a similar crisis. Life, for its own sake, had little hold on the affections of Francis, but he was too sensitive to his own sinfulness, too filled with the holy fear of judgment not to desire time to redeem the past, and lead a holier, a more austere life in the future. But this distress did not last. Taking refuge from the justice of God in His infinite mercy, his anxiety was converted into indifference as to whether he lived or died, provided only the Will of God were accomplished in him.

He recovered, and, just as soon as he was able, started on his journey. Of his visit to Rome we shall only mention two details.

Clement VIII., very much interested beforehand in the young ecclesiastic, was anxious to have some opportunity of seeing him exhibit the learning and all the virtues he was represented to possess, and he

intimated to Francis that he would be examined in his presence. A great concourse of ecclesiastics assembled on the appointed day, and the Pope himself, Baronius, Bellarmine, Cardinal Borromeo (a cousin of St Charles), and other well-known theologians, questioned Francis. His answers not only satisfied everyone that the report given of him had not been exaggerated, but that, besides being very good and very learned, he was very charming into the bargain.

Part of his business in Rome was to lay before the Pope, on behalf of Mgr. de Granier, some very unchristian-like conditions of servitude, relics in fact of Paganism, which still bound vassals of the Genevan Church, and to plead for permission of redemption. Vassals dying without children could not bequeath property; they might not wear black for mourning; some were under obligation to clap their hands all through the night, to keep the frogs from disturbing the bishop's slumbers by their croaking. Clement referred the application, accompanied by a favourable recommendation, to his Nuncio at Turin, with what result we do not know. The incident is mentioned here only as a proof of the sense of the respect due to human dignity that inspired its promoters.

Monsieur de Boisy's death (which has been already described) took place when his son had been more than a year coadjutor. The news reached him in the sacristy at Annecy just as he was on the point of entering the pulpit, but, mastering his emotion by an effort literally superhuman, he preached his

sermon. It was on the resurrection of Lazarus, that wonderful lesson of eternal consolation for all the griefs of time. Restraining his sorrow, and picturing for his audience the scenes around the deathbed at Bethania, the preacher's mind must have carried him to very similar scenes at the Chateau de Sales, where his beloved father's remains were surrounded by all his mourning children except himself. But, controlling his grief, he finished his sermon; then he said these words: "Messieurs, just as I came into this pulpit I heard of the death of him to whom I owe most on earth. My father, your friend, is dead. You were good enough to love him here, and I beseech you now to pray for the repose of his soul, and not to take it amiss if I absent myself for a few days in order to render him the last duties." Then a torrent of tears rushed from his eyes, and he left the pulpit, followed by a sympathetic murmur.

The following year (1602) the interests of the French division of the Genevan diocese took Francis to Paris. The zeal for souls, which made his life one long apostolate, knew no respite from change of place, and as a visitor in Paris he converted several prominent Calvinists. He preached often the simple, moving sermons which had such effect on the many who had heard nothing like them before. Henri IV., a magnanimous admirer of all nobility and sincerity, conceived a cordial liking for him. But this sympathetic feeling on the king's part did not prevent certain of his courtiers from suspecting Francis of being the Duke of Savoy's political agent and of being implicated in Biron's

plot to unite Spain and Savoy against France. One day some friends of Francis came to him much perturbed, and warned him of the danger that threatened him. He was just going to preach, and he left his friends and quietly fulfilled this engagement, then went to the Louvre. Directly the king noticed him he came up to him and said: "There is no need for you to justify yourself, Monsieur de Genève," and then, in a marked manner, went on talking to him for a long time in the presence of all his court.

"Francis," he once said, "has every virtue and not a fault." He praised him indeed perpetually, explaining that the reason he liked him so much was that he "could not flatter."

With this visit to his court began a series of endeavours on his part to persuade Francis to stay in France, the inducement offered being an enlarged field of labour. "Sire," Francis answered gracefully, "I am married, and having married a poor wife, I can't forsake her for a richer."

Six years later Henri renewed the charge, only to be again gently but firmly repulsed; and no doubt, in not forsaking an obscure mountain diocese and the petty prince under whose rule he was born for the greater position he would have filled under the King of France, he chose nobly. But, nevertheless, it is impossible not to regret that a Francis of Sales, rather than a Sully, was not always at Henri's side to prompt his conscience, and to gain over him that ascendency which the bond of common sympathies — both were mountain bred — would have given Francis many opportunities to win. Brave, attrac-

tive, passionately devoted to his people's interests, Henri's was a character that under the loyal, gentle treatment of a Francis would have been all it ever was at best, and more. He would have learnt self-conquest, and his glorious reign might have been the story of a blameless life.

But Francis had another mission to perform. Mgr. de Granier died in the autumn of 1602, and he succeeded him as Bishop of Geneva. The episcopal "Palace"[1] was at Annecy, and there Francis took up his residence in a dignified manner becoming his office, but personally he led a life of evangelical poverty. It would be impossible to say how he managed to get through all the work he did; he not merely spent himself in becoming all things to all men, but poured himself out with lavish prodigality, and yet kept an interior solitude in the fortress of his heart. He not only thought out the whole plan of working for his diocese, disdaining no detail, and settling the administration on a firm, orderly footing, but he continued to regard preaching and the ministry of the Confessional as among his primary duties. The provost had not preached more sermons nor heard more confessions than the bishop continued to do. All over his diocese he instituted the Catechism; and at Annecy took it upon himself as one of his own duties, giving it with such patience, love, devotion, and also with such wonder-

[1] "Palace" is a figurative expression here. Francis lived first at Annecy in a hired house of very modest pretensions. Afterwards President Favre gave him his own hotel. The pious Benedictine who is editing the new edition of our Saint's works, writes to me: "The Bishops of Geneva were exiles in Annecy."

ful capacity for making it interesting, that thirty years after his death, when the interrupted process of his canonisation was resumed, the memory of the bishop's catechisms still was fresh. Children all loved him and flocked about him for a smile or blessing, and sometimes when they had had both, would slip on ahead to catch him and have them over again. One day when he was visiting a community, he left the parlour door open, "Mgr.," said a sister, "the draught must inconvenience you." He got up and went to shut the door, but returned to his seat leaving it still open. "There are so many little children peeping at me through it," he explained, "that I have not the courage to shut it in their faces."

V

Innumerable and well-authenticated facts bear witness to the self-forgetfulness and charity—charity that stooped, or rather rose, to the least details—that he exhibited as a bishop.

"We bishops," he said, "should be like those large public drinking fountains, where all have the right to come for water, and where not only men, but beasts and serpents drink."

One day, while he was at dinner, he was told a stranger wished to see him. He rose at once, and found that his visitor was a nobleman who had come from Normandy on purpose to consult him in regard to some scruples he had about his conduct, and about his doubts in matters of faith. Needless to say the bishop was ready to help him to the utmost of his power. Hour after hour passed,

and still the gentleman kept up the conversation. Supper time arrived, and messenger after messenger came to call the bishop. But his answer only was: "*Nonne anima plus est quam esca?* (is not a soul worth more than a supper?)" For ten hours, by the clock, the gentleman talked, and all the time Francis showed not a sign of either impatience or weariness.

Nor is it to be supposed this patience was due to the quality of his visitor. Eminent preacher as he was, writer, future founder of a religious order, no bishop was ever more practically convinced of the dignity of the poor, the little ones of the Church.

In a small town where he preached the Lent Station one year, he came across a poor lad who had been deaf and dumb from birth. He pitied him so much that he took him into his service, and when told he could never be anything but a useless incumbrance in the household, he answered: "He will be of use to me at any rate. He will teach me how to practise charity." Anticipating the Abbé de l'Epée's work, he succeeded in establishing communication with him by signs, and then began to teach him his religion, until at last the boy could make his mute confession and go to his Easter Communion.

The forgiveness of injuries was a virtue the bishop possessed in such a heroic degree, that it became something like a proverb in Savoy, that the way to make him bestow favours was to do him a bad turn. But this proverb did not go to the root of the matter. It was not merely exterior favours that he bestowed on his enemies; he gave them his heart as well

"Monsieur," he said to a lawyer who had insulted him and calumniated him wherever he could, "I should like you to know that, if you tear out one of my eyes, I shall look affectionately at you with the other."

But this clemency, essentially Christian as it was, and so unlike the clemency of the ancients, which had always its recoil of egotism, is not so astonishing as the bare fact that Francis had enemies. He had them, and unhesitatingly made them for himself, where the alternative would have been a sacrifice of principle. More than once his fidelity to the rule formulated at the Council of Trent, requiring all candidates for benefices to undergo an examination, brought him into collision with exalted personages, who imagined that such rules could never have been intended to affect people of their privileged class. But, neither these haughty pretensions, nor the storm he evoked by refusing to acknowledge them, ever made the bishop yield the point. One of these high and mighty candidates, who came armed with the Duke of Savoy's personal recommendation, was completely posed when Francis at once asked him to translate the words *Nescitis quid petatis* (St Mark x. 38). "Sir," said the bishop, "the words mean, *you know not what you ask*. You have proved to us that your learning falls very far short of what would be necessary to discharge the duties of a cure of souls. It is therefore impossible for me to give you those duties to perform. I do not hold benefices as the master of them. My only right over them is that of conferring them on the most worthy."

This rebuke the disappointed candidate heard with a fury of rage which he went so far as to display even in the cathedral, and the chapter had to take proceedings against him. The civil power sentenced him to a severe penalty, whereupon the bishop intervened, first to have him pardoned, and then to get him an appointment at court, Latin not being there an essential.

Francis had not often to exhibit his great firmness of character in his dealings with the temporal power, for the duke was a Christian prince. But in 1606 the Senate asked the bishop to use his influence in a criminal case, in which, when he came to inquire into it, his conscience forbade him to interfere. Thereupon the Senate threatened him with deprivation of his temporalities unless he complied. The threat created much alarm in the bishop's circle, but his own comment on it was: "Here is a sign that God means me to be wholly spiritual." It was not put into execution, and the matter dropped into oblivion, except that Francis, who had rejoiced on the Senate's own account that extreme measures had not been adopted, continued to cherish some regret that his dream of "having nothing" was not to be fulfilled.

Six years later he was again threatened—on what grounds we do not know—with deprivation, and in terms so derogatory to the dignity of his office that he made a direct and very energetic appeal to the supreme authority. The Senate had then to tender an apology to him, and no sooner had the bishop obtained the satisfaction his duty had bound him to

demand, than, free again to follow his personal inclinations, he singled out the Senator who had exhibited most animus against him, to make him the recipient of a signal favour.

He had an opportunity of displaying another kind of courage in 1616. The Duke of Savoy had in that year invaded the Duchy of Montferrat, territory that belonged to the Duke of Mantua. In this war, in which France sided with Savoy, Spain with Mantua, the Duke of Nemours, influenced by personal grievances, followed the Spanish lead, and laid siege to Annecy with an army, in which the Huguenot element predominated.

The bishop was urged, under these circumstances, to secure his safety by flight or by hiding himself, on the ground that he would be in greater danger than anyone else if the town fell. "My children," he answered, "I will neither hide myself nor be separated from you. I do not think there is any special ill-feeling towards me, and what you suffer I will suffer. God helping me, I shall always be where my duty calls me. If the bell rings for vespers, I shall go to vespers. If I have despatches to draw up, I shall draw them up. If the town is taken by assault, I am in God's hands. But no harm is going to happen to you." This prediction was fulfilled, for after three days' siege the Nemours troops retired.[1]

In the care of souls, Francis was indefatigable. In spite of very frequent illness he moved constantly about his diocese, visiting the wildest, the least accessible parts of it, everywhere speaking luminous

[1] *Vie de St F. de Sales*, par. Ch. Aug. de Sales.

words, and radiating sanctity, and by such attractions and that of his unfailing kindness, discovering for himself his people's wants and miseries. He reformed monasteries, reconciled enemies, converted sinners, comforted the sorrowful, helped the just to persevere, founded schools, colleges, drew up the statutes of the Académie Florimontane and gave it its pretty name, and, while he did all this, he was at the same time carrying on the ordinary routine of his diocesan rule, and the habitual direction of a group of souls at Annecy, and none who wanted him ever found him inaccessible.

But this is by no means an exhaustive list of his labours. Every Lent and Advent he preached courses of sermons, sometimes at small towns in his diocese, sometimes in large French towns, such as Grenoble, Dijon, or Paris itself. In 1618 the Cardinal de Savoie brought him to Paris, and he is computed to have preached three hundred and sixty-five times in the year he spent there. For twenty years of his life his immense correspondence was a source of light, consolation and generous inspiration to a multitude of souls. I purposely refrain from dilating on his other writings at present, or on the work of his predilection; I mean, of course, the foundation of the Order of the Visitation, a work in which his spirit still lives in the world, yet out of it, and for which he prepared by prayer and forethought and by having no will but that of God. And I shall only just mention the name of St Jane Frances de Chantal, that soul worthy of his own, that God put in his path and brought to him to guide.

We shall return to these subjects, which are here alluded to only as *parts* of a whole, of which we are attempting to give some idea; a whole in which nothing was maimed to leave room for something else; each separate part had its own perfection.

Before we speak of the death of Francis, which took place when he was only fifty-five, let us for a few moments speak of his mother. If we have said but little about her, the suggestion of her influence in forming her son's character has, at least, not been absent. He loved her with the deep tender affection such a son was sure to feel for such a mother. She had accepted God's plan for his life with docile courage, and had put herself and her household under his spiritual guidance. Her reward for this submission was the grace of making her preparation for death, at a time when nothing but her own interior conviction foretold its sudden approach. It was made in a month's fervent retreat under her son's direction, at the close of which she went home to the Chateau de Sales. Francis shall tell the rest.

"On Ash Wednesday (1610) my mother went to Thorens, and went to confession and communion, heard three masses and vespers. And that evening, being in her bed, she could not sleep, and made her waiting-woman read her three chapters of the 'Introduction to the Devout Life,' to keep herself in good thoughts, and had the 'Protestation' marked that she might make it in the morning. But God, being satisfied with her good-will, disposed otherwise, for the morning being come, when she tried to rise from her bed she fell as if dead. They came

here for me, and I went at once, taking with me a doctor. When I arrived, being blind and heavy with a drowsiness, she yet tenderly caressed me, saying: 'This is my son and my father both.' She kissed me and put her arms round my neck, and most of all kissed my hand. She lay in the same state two days and a half, and after that nothing seemed to rouse her, and on the 1st of March she gave up her soul to our Lord, gently, peaceably, and with a composure and greater beauty than she had perhaps ever had; in death itself I have seen few remain so beautiful. And as for the rest, I must tell you I had courage to give her the last blessing, and to close her eyes and lips, and give her the kiss of peace at the moment she passed away. After which my heart was very full, and I wept over that good mother more than I have wept since I went into the Church."

Francis survived his mother twelve years, and like her knew when death was at hand. The last months at Annecy were devoted to leave-taking and to setting in order the affairs of the diocese, that his brother, the Bishop of Chalcedon (who had lately become his coadjutor) might so find them.

The Duke of Savoy had asked him to join him at Avignon, where he was going for the purpose of congratulating Louis XIII. on his victories over the Huguenots, and Francis, hoping to induce Louis to grant certain measures in the French portion of the Genevan diocese that would serve the cause of religion, consented at once although well aware that

his health was in no fit state for the journey. He never, in fact, recovered the effects of it. As usual, he had been at everyone's service, and, surrounded by the pomp of the court, had led his usual life of mortification and evangelical poverty. On the return journey he stayed at Lyons, and had been there a month when he suddenly was seized with apoplexy. He recovered both speech and consciousness, and submitted without a murmur to all the very painful remedies that were used in the hope of preserving life. As the end drew near, he spoke no more French. The language he used was the Latin of Holy Scripture, applying the beautiful words of inspiration with his own tender felicity, to those about him, or to himself with intense humility, coupled with a serene confidence in the goodness of God, his soul resting all the time in that attitude of expectancy he has himself described in the "*Traité de l'Amour de Dieu.*"

He used the words, "*Expectans, expectavi Dominum, et intendit mihi. Et exaudivit preces meas, et eduxit me de lacu miseriæ et de luto fœcis.*" "With expectation I have waited for the Lord, and He was attentive to me. And He heard my prayers, and brought me out of the pit of misery and the mire of dregs."

Then, shortly afterwards, clasping the hand of one of those at his bedside, he went on: "*Advesperascit et inclinata est jam dies.*" "It is towards evening, and the day is now far spent."

The last word he was heard to utter was the Name of "*Jesus.*" Silence followed, and then,

while those about him invoked the Holy Innocents, he died.

The simplicity of this gentle death is nothing more than the universal law of cause and effect. If a stormy, erratic life closes in a violent reaction against death, or an agonised effort to make up the task of a lifetime in the little space of the eleventh hour, it is again effect produced by cause. But in a life like the one we have just studied, the death for which the life prepared, is the more beautiful because the life and death are alike; the latter only the continuation, the complement of the former, and the last temporal moments are in fact a perfect double chord, striking the harmony of a holy past, and the key-note of an eternal future.

CHAPTER II

THE SECRET OF SANCTITY

WE have followed St Francis through trial, seen him boldly initiating difficult enterprises, and compassing more work than it seems possible one life could contain, and we have seen the results his work had.

We have found him calm in the midst of surrounding agitation; serene, even joyous, in sorrow; and while tracing the outline facts of his life, we have discovered the balance and harmony of his character. It was a character that kept unerring time and tune, and in which there were no exaggerated developments of particular virtues to the crowding out of others. His gentleness did not prejudice his strength, nor his patience and affability his zeal, nor his simplicity his prudence. Virtues that seem of their very nature to be mutually exclusive, met in his character as distinctive features in a harmonious whole, and were mutually productive.

To discover the secret of all this, we must go below the surface. The root, whence sprang the sap that blossomed into such fruit was in the soul; the fire that emitted such radiant heat and light was an interior fire.

The biographical study of such a life is incomplete

without the psychological study. The first gives an idea of effects, some inkling of their cause; the second, full knowledge of that cause; the two in combination, the life as it was. The moral beauty of our study ought to make it an attractive one, and the practical lesson it contains ought to make it instructive. But more than this, I will frankly add that I think men, whose minds are not distorted by prejudice and who can appreciate in others a nobility they are not themselves devoid of, starting with nothing more than belief in God's existence, will have to acknowledge that such a life peremptorily demonstrates the divinity of the Christian religion, I mean in its unmutilated Catholic fulness.

We shall go first to St Francis himself to discover his secret; then to St Jane Frances de Chantal, who penetrated the depths of his soul as no one else ever did, and whose consummate evidence we are fortunate enough to possess in judicial form. During the nineteen years she was under his direction while he guided her to the heights of Christian perfection, walking himself along the road he led her in, and pressing on before to show her the way, she kept close watch on him. It was one artist watching another from whom he draws his own inspiration, whom he is watching to analyse the processes he employs to produce his effects. She immersed herself in his spirit, drew her light from his light, warmed herself at the fire that burned in him. She remembered everything, understood everything, kept stored in her heart an exact picture of every personal incident. She caught every aspect of her

study, the impression produced by the great whole, and every individual trait besides, the trivial as well as the heroic; had seen his patience and meekness in trial, his humility in prosperity; had been the recipient of saintly confidences about his past; had heard fall from his lips words that came straight from his heart, and were the direct revelation of it.

Her formal evidence on oath was given in fourteen consecutive sittings before the Commissioners of the Holy See, only five years after the death of her "Blessed Father," as she calls him. It was taken down, article by article, as she replied to questions, always with scrupulous discrimination between matters of her own direct knowledge and things heard from others. She expresses herself on every point with an exactitude, gravity, simplicity, that recall the fact that she belonged to a family distinguished for its services in the higher branches of the legal profession. This very remarkable documentary evidence (which covers more than a hundred and fifty pages) is supplemented by a letter on the "virtues of the Bishop of Geneva," which M^me^ de Chantal wrote eighteen months after St Francis died. Naturally freer in style, this letter, taken in conjunction with the formal evidence, puts us into possession of a portrait as faithful to the original as one soul can draw of another.

But to study St Francis from the psychological point of view, from his own words, first let us begin by asking him to tell us what it is that determines the direction and value of moral life, and makes them good or the reverse; and let us turn for an

answer to the "*Traitè de l'Amour de Dieu*," his most important and deeply considered work: "The will governs every other faculty of the human spirit, but, in its turn, is governed by the love that makes the will what it is. The will, no doubt, is the sovereign ruler of love, since the will loves only what it wills to love, and among the several loves that present themselves, can attach itself to the one it chooses. The will chooses as it pleases. But, having chosen, it is then love that becomes ruler, and so remains so long as it survives, the will taking the quality of the love it has espoused."

Here we have the motive springs of the moral life unveiled, and while we gaze on them, we understand how the two affirmations that conscience is for ever urging on us are reconciled. We are free and responsible beings—but, on the other hand, our wills are swayed by love. The individual life and will are made or marred, therefore, by the love which makes them either pure or impure, noble or ignoble.

To this let it be added, that when the will is too feèble to make its choice among the rival loves that present themselves; when it divides itself among them, shilly-shallying between them, rising now to the height of one, now sinking to the depths of another, the life is a broken, inconsequent life. It has no fixed centre, or rather has a variety of shifting, mutually disconnected centres, and, consequently, it developes in a hap-hazard fashion, and is a succession of contradictions and broken threads; it is anarchy, civil war, an army commanded in the same campaign by first one general then another,

the main idea of each being to undo what his predecessor has begun.

Of such incoherence and contradiction we discover no trace in the life of St Francis of Sales. It was a life of continuous growth on one consistent plan. It was of one piece from beginning to close. It advanced always in one and the same direction towards one and the same point. This continuity bespeaks a unity of principle which we must study in order to find the answer to the secret we have proposed to ourselves to discover.

But is it a secret after all? Is not, rather, every exterior detail, every act in the life of St Francis, a manifestation of the hidden principle within, so that, while we study the exterior, we read the interior?

Let us turn once more to his own words: "Among all loves, the love of God holds the sceptre, and so inseparable from, and proper to this love, is this authority to command, that where the love has not the mastery, it ceases to be at all—it perishes."

Here, then, is the whole secret, the key of the mystery of the interior and exterior life before us—an interior and exterior life explicable in no other way, which owe their existence to this vital principle.

II

Let us go deeper into the mystery. "The love of God," we read, "holds the sceptre." That is, has a right to it; "it perishes where it does not rule." But true as this is, the love of God being a virtue

by free adhesion of the will, not by impulsive sentiment of the heart, it is subject to degrees of generosity and purity, and may be more or less mingled with inferior, even if legitimate motives. It is perfect in proportion to its disinterestedness, and as this disinterestedness increases, the soul's interior beauty becomes more perfect—a perfection that manifests itself in more heroic resolutions, in greater fecundity of acts. This fundamental theory of love was set forth by Francis, not only in his wonderful "Treatise on the love of God," but in his own life all through his career. The love of God always followed the law of unceasing growth in his soul, although, touch his life where we may, in the virginal purity of his studentship, in the vigorous manhood of the campaign against heresy, in the Chablais, in his laborious episcopal career, he always seems at each stage of his existence to have reached the utmost heights of love; his love of God, if we may not call it infinite—that word expressing an incommunicable privilege belonging only to God—knew no narrower limits than the utmost capacity of the human heart supernaturalised by grace. "The measure of love," he said, "is to love without measure," and this was what he did as well as taught, he loved without measure.

In Paris, in the terrible trial he underwent as a very young man, he dreaded Hell as a place where God was unloved; and his prayer all through the trial, the prayer which restored him to physical and moral health, was that, at least while his short earthly life lasted, he might have the grace to love

God. The very fear of God became in him, at last, only another aspect of love. He ceased to dread the chastisements of the just Judge. All he feared was that he might disappoint His infinite love by offending Him, grieve His Divine Heart by the slightest infidelity. And so with the virtue of Christian hope. His hope was all placed in God Himself so that everything else, all the benefits that might be bestowed on him, even those that were eternal, were as nothing to him without the Divine Giver Himself. "This morning," he writes to Madame de Chantal, "I could think only of that eternity of blessedness which awaits us, but in which everything but the one invariable, ever present love of the great God, seems to me little or nothing. For indeed Paradise would be in the midst of all the pains of Hell, if only the love of God could be there. And, if Hell were the fire of the love of God, its torments would, I think, be desirable. I saw all celestial content as nothing compared to that sovereign love. Ah! once and for all, let us this very day transport our hearts to the immortal King and henceforward live only for Him. . . . We are wholly God's, and our one aim is the honour of being His. If I had in me but one only little shred of affection that was not His and from Him, I would pull it up in an instant by the roots."

Love of this sort, strong, pure, delicate, is a sovereign principle of action that leaves no detail of life ungoverned. "I clearly recognised," deposes St Chantal, "by his words and actions, that his love of God held sovereign authority, a rule over all his

passions and affections. And I consider it to be a truth of public notoriety, that all the acts of his life were the effects and proof of the holy and divine love which had such strong dominion over his soul."[1]

This sovereign rule and authority was, as we shall see, the fountain head whence flowed all the streams that made the garden of his soul beautiful.

And first of all, order, harmony. God is the principle of order, and the weight, measure, number, that we find in His own works, is, as it were, spontaneously established in the soul in which He reigns by His love. The measure of the soul's advance towards Him, the roads it takes are regulated by what He wills, and conform to the laws He has fixed between the ruling spirit and the subject flesh, the superior and inferior faculties, and between the very virtues themselves. "As he says, that charity coming into the soul, brings with her, and lodges in it, all the virtues that form her train—so in very truth had he put each virtue in its own place in his heart, arranging them in admirable order, so that each had its proper rank and authority, the one not encroaching on the other; because he saw clearly what was suitable to each, what was the perfection of each according to its degree, and each produced the action proper to it as the occasion rose."[2]

As in some well-arranged library, or among neatly classified papers, he saw at a glance what there was in this well-ordered interior. And love, ever on the

[1] Deposition, Art. xxvi.

[2] St Chantal: Letter to the Rev. Father Dom Jean de St Francois on the "Virtues of St Francis of Sales."

watch, sensitive, eager to please the Beloved, quickened his sight to the tiniest speck of dust in the dwelling he was always making ready, showed him how to become day by day purer, more pleasing to God, more faithful to the Divine Master's "*Estote perfecti.*"

"All was in such good order," says M^me^ de Chantal, "so calm, the light of God so bright, that, down to the last atom, he saw the workings of his own spirit. And never voluntarily did that pure soul suffer what it saw to be of less perfection; for his love was too full of zeal to permit that. Not that he did not commit some imperfections—but by surprise and infirmity only—and that he ever allowed any, however small, to fasten itself to his heart, is a thing I never knew."

His soul may then be described as always on the march, and, at the same time, on the watch—not, indeed, to do astonishing things—for he "never made any *mysteries*"—that is, did none of the singular, out-of-the-way things that "are admired by those who look only at the outside, the bark"—but on the march, on the watch, to do better.

The duty, the very possibility of continual progress, is the distinctive privilege of the moral life. In painting, sculpture, poetry, eloquence, the artist reaches a point where he must either stop, or by again touching his work, spoil it. He himself, at some time, attains his highest pitch, and must either rest there or decline. But this inherent limitation does not belong to the moral life.

On the contrary, the soul not only may, but must

be constantly occupied in perfecting the Divine Image in itself, in making it truer to the beauty of the original, and this even where all striking acts of self-devotion occur in the early stages of life, leaving the rest commonplace.

As to the form this unceasing progress must take, it must be reform. The natural has to be supernaturalised, the "old man" changed into the "new," and till this is accomplished the sword must not be put into the scabbard; till all resistance has been not only weakened, but absolutely conquered, the struggle must go on.

There is a particularly interesting instance of this successful warfare in the life of St Francis of Sales. There was no virtue for which his contemporaries admired him more than the gentleness which was the chief secret of his power over others, and this virtue was a conquest. By nature he had the impetuosity of character which is commonly supposed to belong to fine generous spirits, and on which we often see people priding themselves because they have not taken the trouble to find out that a quick temper is not necessarily the companion of high courage, and such people actually sometimes imagine that by checking the one they will put out the fire that feeds the other. Francis did not take any such view as this. He faced his impetuosity as one of the enemies he had to overcome; and let us understand why. An element of disorder, it introduces loss of self-control and equilibrium into the soul; a species of impatience, it leads to the kindred sin of anger and the numerous sins that are the progeny

of anger; it hinders spiritual influence, and is contrary to the spirit of the Gospel which says "*Beati Mites*," and to our Saviour's example, for he said "*Discite a Me quia mitis sum.*"

In her deposition St Chantal says: "His sweetness was incomparable—and this is a truth that all publicly know, but those especially who experienced how perfect this sweetness was." But we need not further quote her on the matured virtue, it will be more to the purpose to learn how the goodly fruit was cultivated and brought to perfection. This, she tells us, was at the cost of severe and persevering toil: "Once he told me he had been three years trying to gain this holy virtue." But he had not told her enough. He may indeed have devoted three particular years of his life to the campaign, three years of greater effort in one direction, but in the general formation of the virtue he was engaged much longer. "Once," says St Chantal, "when we were subjected to some annoying opposition about this Monastery of the Visitation, I begged him to show a little resentment. 'Would you have me lose in one quarter of an hour,' he answered, what it has taken me twenty years' hard work to acquire?' On another occasion, when there was great and just reason for anger, he told me he had had to take the reins in both hands to keep his anger back." One must be acquainted with these characteristic details to appreciate the moral beauty of the portrait that precedes them, and to understand the full extent of the labour revealed in the following simple words: "I have never heard it said

that anyone had ever seen this Blessed One do any angry act." [1]

Even the soul, then, of a St Francis of Sales, a soul in which virtue early assumed the character of saintliness, had to be reformed. But in the progressive spiritual life, the life that goes *de virtute in virtutem*, that is from good to better, reform is only a minor operation. Absolute perfection, imitation of the God-Man, were the aims Francis kept before him, and, striving to fulfil ideals which constantly presented new heights to climb, he mounted higher and higher, carried upwards by the mighty impulse of love, and was continually purifying his intentions, making his will more pliant, his self oblation more perfect; loving with purer and ever purer love Him whom he knew he never could love enough, or with enough of self-forgetfulness.

And here again his doctrine was the formulary of his life, his life the manifestation of his doctrine. "True virtue," he tells us, "has no limit; it goes beyond and beyond. But above all, holy charity, the virtue of virtues, having an infinite Object, would itself be capable of becoming infinite, could it but find a heart capable of infinity. And it is an extreme favour for our souls that they may grow on and on without end in the love of God all the time this failing life lasts." [2]

To give any idea of the measureless love to which he attained himself, we shall have to employ a word which he often uses in his letters of direction and in

[1] Deposition, Art. xxxii.

[2] *Traité de l'Amour de Dieu.* Book iii., chap. i.

reference to his own spiritual development. But as it is one that has been often unjustly criticised, from a misconception of its sense, we pause to fathom something of his own explanation before venturing to use it.

Love is love; that is, is freer from admixture, is purer, just in the degree in which it unites itself to the Divine Object, and frees itself from other attachments and preferences. Pure love loves the Will of God, not for any kind of advantage or sweetness, but simply and only because it is His Will. In every precept of the natural and revealed law, in the commands of lawful superiors, in signs and inspirations, it recognises God's Will, and once having recognised it, follows it unto death. And though it cannot know how it will be manifested in future events and accidents, pleasing or unpleasing, in this ignorance it loves it implicitly; it waits for the manifestation, ready, not merely to submit to what it cannot escape, for that would not be Christian; nor merely resigned, for that implies a preference for something else; but gladly ready to embrace it under no matter what form manifested.

This peaceable state, the peace of expectant love, Francis calls indifference—a word we now understand to mean not the coldness, the torpor of a heart that does not feel, but the supreme effort of a supremely loving heart, the term of self immolation, the immolation of self-will and the heart of flesh, to replace them by the will, the heart, the mind of God Himself.

In the "*Traité de l'Amour de Dieu*," a passage of

unconscious autobiography describes this progress of love by the path of sacrifice:

"The love of God, conformity to the Divine pleasure, can be practised either by holy resignation or holiest indifference. Resignation is practised by effort or submission. We would like better to live than to die, but because God pleases that we should die, we acquiesce. We willingly would live were it His pleasure, and even wish it were His pleasure. We die willingly, but still more willingly would live. Resignation prefers God before other things, yet loves many other things besides His Will. But indifference is higher than resignation because it loves nothing, except for love of the Divine Will. What matters it to me, then, whether the Divine Will be offered to me in tribulation or in consolation, since in either I will look only for the Divine Will, and it I shall discern all the more readily if, in the thing offered, there be no beauty save that belonging to the most holy and good pleasure of God? When I want only pure water, what is it to me whether it be brought in a golden or a glass vessel? I shall drink nothing but water from either; and because glass has no colour but that the water gives it, I like it the better of the two, but only for this reason that I see the water better in it."

To suppose that this sublime indifference to events would prevent energetic action, where it is a duty, would be a mistake. "While God's good pleasure is unknown to us, all we can do is to attach ourselves, with all our strength, to His will, manifested or signified to us; but, His pleasure becoming ap-

parent, we must that very instant fall into our place of loving obedience. My mother or I (for it is all one) is ill in bed. How do I know whether it be the will of God that death shall follow? I certainly cannot know, but I can, and do know that, while I await the event ordained by his good pleasure, I ought, according to His declared will, to employ every remedy suited to cure the sickness. This I do, therefore, omitting nothing I can do that will contribute to the cure. But, should it be His good pleasure that the sickness prove stronger than the remedies, and it conquers by bringing death, the very moment that event has certified me of His good pleasure, I lovingly will acquiesce in the highest point of my spirit, whatever may be the repugnances of my soul's inferior powers."

All this is just what happened when His own mother died. He has told us that after he closed her eyes, his heart was "so swollen with grief that he wept as he had not since he went into the Church. And yet," he adds, "in the middle of the heart of flesh that so deeply felt her death, I was very sensible of a certain suave tranquillity, a certain gentle repose of mind in the Divine providence, which shed a great content over my soul among all its distresses."

It seems almost unnecessary to add that this loving self-abandonment, which he practised in regard to his tenderest affections, extended to every work he undertook, no matter how near his heart. The foundation of the Visitation was a work peculiarly dear to him. He foresaw that it would be one of

great advantage to many souls, and he had good reason to think it bore the stamp of the "declared" will of God from the circumstances that first put the idea into his mind; then in his having been brought into relationship with M^me^ de Chantal, in a manner that gave him opportunities of studying her in the character of foundress. But, only five weeks after the first Foundation, the foundress was struck down with a fever that endangered her life. "In this necessity," she tells us, "he came to visit me, and he said: 'Perhaps God is satisfied with our attempt and our good will in trying to form this little band, as He was with Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son. And, if it be pleasing to Him, in His goodness, that we turn back now when we are half-way on our journey, His holy will be done.' "[1]

The sovereign love of God that brings this perfection of order into the soul, and is always urging it on to higher things, teaches it to have the same utter confidence in God's holy will that a little child has in its father—here we have harmony, detachment, trust; in a word, the natural atmosphere of holy peace. "Some," says the Imitation, "are at peace with themselves and others; some are at peace neither with themselves nor others; some being themselves established in peace, strive to establish it among their brethren."

Him, who belongs to this last category, the Imitation calls the *bonus homo pacificus*, the "good *pacific* man," *i.e.* the "maker of peace." This exactly describes what St Francis was. We have spoken of

[1] St Chantal: Dep., Art. xxxix.

him already as writer, preacher, confessor, director, bishop, founder, and we ought to have spoken of him as a judge. Elected by the people's confidence, he fulfilled the duties of a judge as unremittingly as if all his time were at his own disposal, and even heretics appealed to the informal court over which he presided. "It was commonly reported," deposes St Chantal, "that he had been given the gift of imparting peace to souls that conferred with him. Once, when two men had a violent dispute in the visitation parlour at Annecy, he looked, I remember, first at one then at the other very sweetly, and spoke such admirable words to them, that, touched at last by his kindness, they grew quite quiet, and he sent them away at peace together. He recommended this same peace to all the souls he governed, and he worked zealously to impart it to everyone he could. He had a deadly hatred of lawsuits, and every other kind of dispute, but between people who were on the point of going to law with one another he was always ready to try and make terms. This gave him endless work to do, and absorbed much of his time, for he was for ever being asked to arbitrate between persons of quality and others. So constantly, indeed, was he taken up by this sort of work, that the number of lawsuits he prevented and the disputes he calmed was almost infinite."

This contagious peace sprang from the same fixed indwelling principle that has given all his writings, and every recorded act of his life, a grace of ineffable serenity, by which they may almost be recognised; a frank gentle gaiety that is grave as well as gay,

a depth of calm joy which neither tribulation nor press of toil ever troubled, and which, to use one of his own symbols, is like the "nightingale pouring out her song from the middle of a thorn bush."

III

In the last two chapters we have been occupied, first with the exterior, then with the interior life of St Francis, and now it remains to show that these two were one, in virtue of a common principle residing in the former.

It is especially necessary to bring this principle, prominently forward in the present day when the experiment of developing the social virtues, by isolating them from those of religion, a process very like cutting branches off the parent stem and trying to make them grow by depriving them of sap, is a common official programme.

Theorists of this kind, who knew only of St Francis what has been said in our last chapter, would object here: "Of what use in social life are men whose hearts are so taken up with the love of God? What room is there for the love of man?" And they have a dream of universal brotherhood which is to be realised when the world is peopled with atheists. But, meantime, to answer their question. The heart of Francis was indeed wholly taken up with the love of God; but, however contradictory it may sound, there was plenty of room in it for the love of man too. Of all his illustrious contemporaries, none loved his fellow-men better, none with the same grace of

amiability. His friends, he loved with a charm of friendship it is difficult not to dwell upon; his family, with a tenderness all his own. "My mother and I," he said, "it is all one." He was not only a model son, brother, friend; he loved all men and strangers as his own, enemies as his friends. He risked his life often for people he did not know, was at everyone's service day or night; his purse, his heart, was always open; he never allowed anyone to feel their calls upon him inopportune. If he had any preference it was for the poor, the despised, the forgotten, or for his enemies, especially those who had done him grievous injury, and who hated him most violently. As to the charge that he was a mystic and loved God too much to love men, we need only say that his lesser charities would furnish plenty of material to fill a very respectable number of minor philanthropists' lives; his disinterested public and private services, his devotion to interests not his own, enough to fill many useful public lives of the average kind.

If the free thinker does not believe this and will not understand it, we can only say that the evidence of facts proves that the men whose only love has been the love of God, are those who have loved mankind with an enthusiastic constancy, an intuition and universality, a heroic generosity and self abnegation, in small and great things, found in no other lives.

See, for instance, our Saint in the confessional. "He would leave everything to go to it. On

Sundays and Festivals a great many people came, lords and ladies, townspeople and soldiers, servants and country-folk, beggars, dirty foul-smelling people with skin diseases and other miseries, and he received everyone, making no distinctions, and *not respecting persons*.[1] On the contrary, the people of the last mentioned sorts he received, I firmly believe, with more interior charity and exterior tenderness than the others." [2]

Or see him beside a sick-bed. "Once he went to visit an old man who had a very offensive smell. 'Monseigneur,' said the sick man's daughter, 'this odour must, I fear, be very disagreeable to you.' 'These are my roses,' was his answer." St Chantal, summing up his character, and speaking not only for herself, says: "Not a few people, of whom I am one, think he shortened his life by his zealous charity for his neighbours' good, often giving up his food, drink, and sleep, and enduring toils and discomforts such as no one but himself would have borne."

All this can be understood only by taking a position diametrically opposed to that on which the (unfortunately) very large class of objectors I have in view, take their stand. They tell us that "people who love God so much as all this do not love men at all." We say, "people who do not love God do not love men, or at least not as St Francis did." They may love something lovable in their character, be kind to them because their own hearts are good, their impulses generous (a different thing from the habit of self-sacrifice); they may recognise in them

[1] St Luke xx. 21. [2] St Chantal, Art. xlii.

ties of family or country. But the Christian takes his view of the human race from the fixed standpoint of his faith. All men are his "neighbours," whom the sovereign love of God that rules his heart, not only does not prevent his loving, but commands him to love; and this subordinate love, as the direct and necessary consequence of the ruling love, increases as it increases, grows as it grows. All the wonderful feats of charity we read of in such lives as those of St Francis Xavier in India, St Vincent of Paul in France, our own Francis in Savoy, and of the other Saints the Church has placed on her Altars, are nothing but the natural fruit produced by the supreme love of God. Nor is it only in such lives as these that these fruits are produced. A vast multitude of hidden lives, the secret of which only God knows, produce them; lives such as we have before us all the day long in those voluntary servants of the poor, the aged, the infirm, the afflicted of every kind, whom the *fraternity* of a revolutionary century is so anxious to do away with for the benefit of mankind, or perhaps because a standing protest against their theoretical fallacies, is found irksome.

There is no real difficulty in understanding the relationship between the love of God and the love of man. As children of the same Heavenly Father, descendants of the same human parents, Faith teaches us to see in every man a brother; it teaches us to see in every soul the image of God, soiled, defaced perhaps, but capable of recognition and restoration. And more, it teaches us that the Son

of God so loved these souls that He died for their salvation, and that to be His disciple, enter His Kingdom, we must follow His example and love all men, but especially the poor and neglected, of whom He said, "doing it unto them you did it unto Me."

The love of man is, in fact, not merely a correlative duty, it is an essential integral part of the love of God; and so true is this, that, where it does not exist, there can be no true love of God. All this is not an invention to order. It is the doctrine the Church has always taught, which all her Saints have developed in their lives and writings; it is of her very essence and interior economy.

Let us hear what St Francis himself has to tell us of the room every legitimate affection finds in the heart that is filled with the love of God; and by legitimate affection, we mean every affection that can be brought into relationship with God Himself. "He who says *all*, excepts nothing. Yet may a man still say that he is all God's, that he belongs altogether to his father, mother, country, prince, friends, children, and belonging to each he yet belongs all to all. Now this may be, inasmuch as the duty by which belongs all to me, is not contrary to the duty by which he belongs all to another."[1] This is but the evidence of daily experience. But let us go a little further and ask St Francis to explain to us what the gospel means when it says that the second commandment is like the first; that is, why the love of man is the

[1] *Traité de l'Amour de Dieu.* L. x., chap. iii.

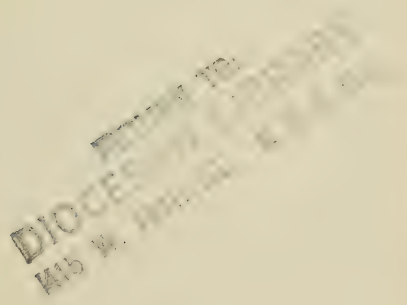
direct and necessary consequence of the love of God. "When we behold our neighbour, whom God has created to His own image and likeness, ought not we to say to one another: 'See this creature who is so like the Creator. Shall we not fall upon his neck and embrace, caress him, shed tears of love over him?'

"And for what reason? Is it for love of the creature? No, for we know not whether he be worthy of love or of hatred. Why, then? For the love of God, who has formed the creature to His own image, and consequently has made him capable of participating in His own goodness. And, for this reason, the Divine love not only commands us again and again to love our neighbour, but itself produces this love as its own image and likeness, and sheds it over our hearts. For just as man is the image of God, so is his sacred love of his fellow man the very image of his celestial love of God. But the subject of the love of our neighbour requires a treatise apart."

This treatise he never wrote, but he did better, he lived it.

And now to draw our conclusions, and first a practical one. Since these lives of heroic charity are found nowhere in their perfection outside the pale of Christianity, the enemies of Christianity who would like to banish its influence from every school and benevolent institution, and even from men's hearts, are pursuing a policy distinctly antagonistic to society; to abolish the Divine philanthropy of the Christian religion would be positively inhuman.

Our next conclusion is doctrinal. The living Christianity of the Catholic Church alone produces such beautiful fruits as these lives, hence we deduce the existence of some singular force in the Church. Were it some merely human force it would act in other human corporations. But its effects are superhuman, therefore it also must be superhuman, and the Church tells us what it is. She tells us of the true and living God, the one and vivifying source of that Divine Grace, without which no man can love either God or his neighbour as he ought, and more than tells us of it, conveys it to us. In a word, Christianity is of God because it has the privilege of creating saints.



CHAPTER III

THE WRITER

TO make this chapter a purely literary study in the sense of ignoring the moral and spiritual interests to which the last was devoted would be impossible; but let us begin it by remarking that, as a very important factor in the formation of modern French prose, the writings of St Francis have never received the recognition they deserve. He writes as the saint, the apostle, the director, consoling here, inciting, encouraging there, and, for that reason, the charm of his singularly lucid style, though felt instinctively, is overlooked in the practical interest of what he says. But the omission of his name from the roll of writers who have created French prose would leave a gap impossible to fill.

In proof of this assertion, we would suggest the following experiment: let the reader study a page of Amyot, Balzac, and Fénelon, respectively, trying to grasp the distinctive physiognomy of each; and next, to study literary evolution, let him compare, first Amyot with Balzac, then both these writers with Fénelon.

Amyot's style is antique. The tongue he uses is far from being the full-grown, finished language of the present day; but it is the French Fénelon de-

lighted in for its lively simplicity. It is perfectly natural, therefore easy; spontaneous, glad, but trammelled, the constructions awkward—the graceful awkwardness of a child. It is often laboured, but never stilted, and therefore never irritating. With every respect for the worthy old bishop's dignity, his writing reminds one of the gambolling of a big Newfoundland puppy, tumbling and stumbling about on his yet unhardened paws, but lithe even when he trips himself.

Balzac has outgrown this childishness, and its grace with its clumsiness, nor is kindly mirth the feeling he evokes. He is a student in rhetoric, and at the top of his class; he talks in rhetoric; his most familiar notes are on elaborated plans. He made rough copies of them first, erased with a judicious penknife, and, one feels sure, read his finished compositions aloud to himself with satisfaction in his own noble periods. For noble is the right epithet to apply to him. His discourses are more or less eloquent; his phrases well turned, stately. But he, too, is clumsy, and not with the child's grace. He drapes himself in his periods as in a toga, gets embarrassed in the folds and struggles out, in a dignified manner, no doubt, but with a muscular effort too perceptible not to damage the effect.

With Balzac began the Ciceronian epoch in literature, an epoch not yet closed. Descartes was heavy too, but his matter is so weighty that a substantial style suits it. Dare I say that even Bossuet's very early sermons have something of this

same laborious amplitude? But the perfection of genius is always naturally simple, and, in Bossuet's case, his tremendous genius soon freed itself; he learnt the art of concealing his art, and gradually his Ciceronianism was counteracted by the influence of the Bible, of Homer, of Demosthenes, and, most of all, by the great orator's own overpowering personality. But Balzac's influence is traceable all along the majestic stream of literature in the *grand siècle;* it is so noble, its stateliness so sustained, that one feels it a relief to get into a lighter atmosphere.

Not, of course, that in the century that produced Pascal's *Provinciales*, Mme de Sevigné's letters, and Molière's plays, these remarks are universally applicable. In these and other examples, we have a totally different kind of writing, a style brilliant, incisive, witty, often caustic, that is the offspring of the old *esprit gaulois*, subdued to something like propriety and decency by the study of classical literature, and by the improved tone of the best society. But in spite of such instances, the noble, the oratorical, held its own all through the century.

Next we come to Fénelon. Very great is the distance between the marvellously flowing language that falls from this facile pen, and old Amyot's floundering efforts to surmount the difficulties of construction that hampered him, in common with other sixteenth century writers. Nor is it like Balzac's pompous periods and affectation of the grand style. Nor like Pascal's mordant causticity, or Mme de Sevigné's worldliness; still less has it any affinity with Molière's almost libertine audacity. Whence, then,

was it derived? Primarily, of course, from Greece, but not directly, and St Francis of Sales was the intermediary.

A comparison of the two writers makes it impossible to doubt the connection, for resemblances are multiplied. The later writer is less self-forgetful, has less vivacity, less salt, more art, more learning, more variety; but, allowing for the difference of a whole century, the styles and language are astonishingly alike. These two points—style and language, continually strike one in reading St Francis. Chronologically he must be classed as a writer of the sixteenth century, for in 1600 he was thirty-three, an age at which a man's modes of speaking and writing are usually confirmed habits. By that time his orthography was fixed, his vocabulary almost settled; but, in the turn of his sentences, in his manner of connecting them, in the ease of his constructions, he is a more modern writer, uses language far more like that of the present day, than do, not only any of his own contemporaries, but even Balzac, Richelieu, Descartes, Voiture, or any other writer of the earlier half of the seventeenth century. Opening the *Vie Dévote* or the *Correspondance* hap-hazard, and reading almost the first page that comes—I do not mean in a modernised edition, but in the good old original text, now happily easy of access—one finds that, except for a few archaic words such as *ains* (but), *voirement* (truly), *nuisance* (hurt or pity), *avette* (bee), the language is the polished French of to-day, the pages might have been written last year. No one

reading the original intelligently, can fail to see that to try and improve on it would only injure it.

I lay stress on this matter of style, because here even more than in most cases, the "style is the man." To scrutinise the writings of St Francis, is to read the exquisitely fashioned spirit that "created them to its own image."

It is quite possible that a man who writes without having anything to say may have what is known as style—a style that catches the reader's attention, keeps him as it were on a threshold which has nothing beyond it, introduces him to a well-dressed figure which he finds, on examination, to be made of straw. The ear is pleased, but there are no striking ideas revealed by the brilliant antitheses, no deep thoughts echoed in the fine oratorical effects, the high sounding oracular formularies screen nothing but vacancy.

But style has other functions in the case of a writer who has ideas to express, truths in which he believes, to propound. The one primary, I might say the one really essential quality of style, is transparency—the transparency of glass through which we see other things, or that of the atmosphere, so clear that it intercepts neither light nor colour. The qualities that give this transparency are nicety of language, the instinct of appropriate words, good taste, the gift of nature—where these fail, there the writer's spirit is obstructed in its passage to the reader. But I do not think these qualities, or any one of them, are extrinsic to the

matter; limpidity implies something more than exterior forms—grace, power, brilliance, grandeur, feeling, are not merely stucco ornaments, in their proper place when clothing naked walls. On the contrary, to be genuine they should, by a natural process of germination and development, penetrate from the interior to the exterior, spring from a parent stock of thought or feeling. Style has no inherent rights. It has only one function, that of interpretation, one virtue that of fidelity, and should know no art but that of self-effacement.

We have, in St Francis, a writer in whom there was something more than the simultaneous growth of thought and feeling. In him, thought and feeling are absolutely fused together in the same flame; and this flame, emitting light as well as heat, we shall have no difficulty in recognising as the love we have seen pulsating to and from his heart, and permeating every action of his life; the love of one who is the Truth itself. What better thing, then, can we ask of him as a writer, than to let us see himself? What greater loss could he inflict on us than to deprive us of this by hiding himself under a style overcrowded with ornament.

But we have nothing of this kind to fear. He looked on affectation and artificiality, as forms of pride and insincerity, and wrote, not to win fame, not for the love of literature, but to do good and for the love of God. The law of his life was one with that of his style; he had not two characters; the man, the writer, were both the Saint. He did not affect depth; but knew and wrote of deep

things, to make his readers understand them as concerning their lives here and hereafter. What he has to say, he says, therefore, as clearly as he can, avoiding a studied brevity that might have won applause, but which he would have thought an almost fraudulent abuse of his readers' intelligence. He wrote to bring souls to God and His truth, not to keep them puzzling over the meaning of formularies reduced to the minimum of words.

He was equally free from affected energy, never spoke loud to frighten people into submission, or tried to palm off bluster for reasoning. But almost proverbially gentle as he was, it was the gentleness of the strong, and he never forgot the truth of the saying: "It's no kindness to a neighbour not to tell him there's a wolf on his road." In more than one instance the *Controverses* show that he could repulse an adversary very vigorously.

Nor did he affect the exquisiteness of the Pharisee of culture. I do not mean by this that he wrote carelessly, for in point of fact the choice language he uses shows plenty of legitimate care; he says noble things in noble words, but they are at the same time simple ones, the simplicity of truth: there is no making speeches to himself, no self gratulation in their fine effect.

There are none of the abrupt transitions, jerks, starts, fitfulness of a soul in revolt, or that has slipped its moorings and drifted into stormy waters. He writes peacefully, as one who has known much of sorrow and some joy, and of both he speaks calmly, perhaps especially of sorrow, but with an

intense sympathy that vibrates from his own serene and loving soul. He reminds us of one of those beautiful lakes that one comes across in the Alps, reflecting sky and shore, and drawing radiant emerald and sapphire hues into their bosoms from the sun, or of a great river flowing on with swift and steady current, full always, but overflowing never.

He speaks often of bees (*avettes*), drawing happy comparisons from their diligent ways, and himself rather reminds one of a mountain bee hiding itself to make its sweet, transparent, deliciously scented honey.

He was facile as well as unaffected, gay without the flippancy of a Montaigne, grave without the heaviness of his contemporaries. His phrases, long and short, say just what he intends, translate his very thought; all he utters comes from his soul and partakes of its unction; is wise, kind, grave, tender, pious, but not sad, for how could one who told everybody who came to him for advice, to "*Live joyfully and be generous*" be doleful himself?

To sum up his style, it is typically that of Christian France—clear, simple, accurate, subtle, animated, resolute, tender, spiced with dashes of good humoured gaiety, caustic touches that never burn too deep.

There are two points on which St Francis foregoes any self-denying ordinance he may have imposed on himself in other respects. The first is in the expression of tender feeling. He exclaims, repeats, protests, and with a cordiality, a sincerity that pre-

vents anything like disgust. One feels such a man was really in earnest, really speaking the truth, when he wrote: "I am united to you by the most perfect love," or, "my heart is dedicated to your heart"; for one knows the fountain whence he drew these feelings was the sacred infinite fountain of the love *stronger than death.*

The other point is *comparisons*, and on this we shall have to dwell rather longer. In common with his great patron, the Seraph of Assisi, our Saint lived much with nature, and, not a poet in the technical sense, had the poetic sentiment in its highest form—that is, in the visible he saw the invisible. Possessed by the spirit of his apostolate, he beheld everything in direct relationship to souls, instinctively storing up in his mind everything that offered itself to his sight, to be reproduced at the right moment in order to lift souls to higher things; the rivulet to remind it of the source whence it came, the ray of light as symbolic of a brighter ray proceeding from an everlasting Sun. Everything was in fact to him symbolical, and not only in nature, but in human art; not the tortured symbolism of artificial analogy, but pictures from nature that leave the reader to make his own deductions. This habit of mind, this poetry of feeling, all the more beautiful because the grace is accidental, not studied, has been very happily described by the ingenious author of the *Spirit of St Francis of Sales.*

"He used to take me in a boat on the lake that bathes the shores of Annecy, or for a walk through

gardens on those same delightful banks, and everything he saw provoked some lofty thought. If one showed him beautiful plants, he would say: 'We are the field that God cultivates.' If buildings: 'We are buildings made by God.' If flowers: 'When shall our blossoms ripen into fruits?' If rare and beautiful paintings: 'Nothing is so beautiful as the soul created to the image of God.' If he were led into some garden: 'Oh, when will the garden of our soul be covered with flowers, full of fruits, prepared, put into perfect order, freed from all rubbish? When will it be shut close against everything that displeases the heavenly Gardener?' If he saw a fountain: 'When will there be in our hearts fountains of living water springing up into eternal life? How long shall we go on forsaking the fountain of living water, and digging out for ourselves cisterns that hold none?' If a beautiful valley: 'The waters that flow into the valley are pleasant and useful. So flow the waters of grace into the souls of the humble, leaving dry the tops of the mountains, that is, the souls of the proud.'" [1]

No one who has not read the works of St Francis of Sales can appreciate the grace, wealth, fecundity of his mind. We can do no more than suggest and hint. Even the selection of specimens is difficult among so many equally fascinating passages.

"The rivers which flow gently along the plain, bear on their bosom great ships filled with rich merchandise; the rains that fall softly on the land,

[1] IV. Part, ch. xxiv.

fertilise grass and grain. But torrents, rivers that go tumbling in big waves over the earth, make havoc where they go, and are useless for traffic; rain that is vehement, tempestuous, ruins fields and meadows. Work that is done impetuously, hurriedly, is never well done; as the old proverb says, *hurry without flurry*. Drones make a great deal more noise, fly about much more quickly than other bees, but they only make wax, not honey; and just in the same manner, those people who are always fussing about in a state of poignant anxiety and noisy solicitude, do little, and that little ill.

"Be like little children holding with one hand their father's hand, and with the other gathering strawberries, and other berries, out of the hedges. In the same manner, while you go along, gathering up and handling the things of this world with one hand, with the other hold fast the hand of your Heavenly Father, looking at Him now and again just to see if He is pleased with your home, and with what you are doing. And above all things, never for a moment lose your hold of His hand and protection, thinking you will gather more if you have the use of both your own hands, for when He leaves you to yourself, you will not take a single step alone without falling flat on your nose. By all this, my Philothea, I mean that when you are busy with common things and common business matters that do not require the very most pressing and urgent attention, you should think of God more than of them. And when your business is such that, to do it well, you must give it your whole

attention, you should look at Him now and then; doing as mariners do; for when they want to reach some country they look up to the sky, not down to the waves they are sailing over. In this manner, God will work for you, with you, in you, and when your work is done will comfort you."

In this extract there are four comparisons to develop the same idea. Rivers and torrents, bees and drones, children, mariners. Too many, perhaps, but which ought to have been left out? Not the first: it is too striking, too applicable. Not the second: it is too subtle, too practically useful in the case of the over eager, the fussy. Not the fourth, it surely would be a pity to lose a comparison so deep, so full of condensed meaning; that fundamental rule of life, the looking up to find our way, exemplified by a familiar image which catches something of the sublime from the suggestion of the almost infinite immensity of firmament above, sea below?

There is still the third comparison. But who is so utterly destitute of all sense of the poetry of little things, as not to feel the charm of that picture: the child holding its father's hand in one of its own little hands, and with the other gathering berries from the hedges. He must have seen these things, thought of them, just as he tells us of them; and, search where we may, it would be very difficult anywhere to find a better example of the delightful art of turning the very commonest things of life into vehicles for expressing the noblest thoughts.

But, however it may be with these four com-

parisons, it is none the less true that the one thing in which our Saint is really a little old-fashioned, is just in this matter of comparisons; and that, not by his own fault, but by that of his age. In point of science it was exactly on a level with the age of Pliny, an author much in favour, to whose account many fables must be laid. St Francis, well-read himself, and writing often to, or for, other well-read persons, went constantly to Pliny for his explanatory symbolism, and not having the slightest intention of teaching natural history, he neither criticises nor examines, but simply takes for granted whatever Pliny asserts. In consequence of this, his own immutably true and just thoughts are often explained by symbols that modern science has disproved. When he goes straight to nature and looks at her with the eyes of the Saint, he really understands her, feels her, he inhales her very breath, and his comparisons have then the virtue of perpetual youth and freshness. But when he studies her through the medium of the somewhat too scientific science of the ancients, he loses sight of nature among fusty fables, and frames the lessons he teaches in old wives' tales that mar their effect.

It would hardly be less unfair to form a judgment of his style and manner by the funeral oration he pronounced over the Duke de Mercœur, an elaborate composition in which he does violence to himself in deference to hereditary family respect. His own taste, had he but followed it, would never have led him astray; but here he disregarded it

to write according to the false canons of the day. Occasionally there is not wanting a certain beauty of idea and feeling; here and there is a passage too truly eloquent ever to become old fashioned, but, as a whole, the style is forced, the writer evidently having felt that his natural style did not suit the solemn circumstances of the case. He tried, in fact, to write up to them, and was not himself in the attempt. He loses himself in long drawn phrases; he, from whose graceful pen words generally fell so easily, so evenly, goes hunting about for out of the way metaphors as if afraid of using common ones—he whose mere touch made everything uncommon—and the result of all this effort is infinitely less effective than would have been his own natural language.

This sort of deference to passing fashion is very common in young writers; even those who have become famous in later life, have, in a good many instances, struggled through an apprenticeship of subserviency to contemporary fashion, before finding out they could soar far higher on the wings nature gave them. Joseph de Maistre, a Savoyard like St Francis, was one of these; at a time when his private correspondence shows how well he could already write, he was publishing printed matter that rings false and is filled with the sentimental affectation that the contemporary journalism of that revolutionary epoch delighted to honour.

But it is not in such feats of oratorical display that the real Francis of Sales is found. He is in his moral and spiritual works, in his correspondence.

He is a pattern writer here as to the forms and turns of expressions he uses; the model moralist in loftiness of thought, in depth and refinement of analysis. And especially ought he to be studied in both these aspects, in the *Introduction to the Devout Life*, a work he meant at first for the guidance of a single soul, and which he wrote piece by piece, day by day. Whether analysing the soul's maladies or prescribing formularies of conduct, whether urging to perfection or pointing out the obstacles that obstruct the progress of the soul, the author in his thoughts and language, in his compassionate tenderness, stands on a plain of perfection very hard to reach, but harder to hold. But it is above all in his *Correspondance* that we seem to touch the very secret of the saintly charm that invests his pen. It is for his *Letters* that he has reserved his most exquisite touches; in them uttering many things that he does not put into words, he expands in width and breadth; in them that his noblest thoughts are dressed in noblest words; in them that, speaking with an eloquence that comes straight from his heart, he consoles the mourning with brave tenderness, points to the nobility of sacrifice and speaks of reunion that shall know no end. It is in his *Letters*, in short, that he excels himself and is positively translucent. Perhaps Joubert had them in his mind when he said: "*The closer the resemblance between word and thought, thought and soul, soul and God, the greater the beauty.*" At any rate the words are too appropriate not to be quoted.

Let us bring this chapter to a close by offering a piece of advice to those authors who write on the virtues and vices, the joys and sorrows of the human race. I would venture to say to them, write as he did. And if they reply that to do so they would have to think as he did, love as he did, live as he did, I can only say, that they are right.

CHAPTER IV

DOCTRINE

THE "interior" life, its conduct, are distinctive features of Christian morality. And should we be asked what this life is, we would say first that it is not the solitary, not the contemplative life. Indeed, our Saint tells us that, necessary in the cloister where everything tends to assist "recollection," it is of still greater necessity in the world where everything tends to "dissipation."

The interior life consists mainly in two things—the intention, *i.e.* the direction of the will towards a fixed object, that object being in fact the goal the life proposes to itself as final—the affections, in other words, the sentiments on which the heart feeds and which leave their mark on the actions they prompt.

"Man," says the Imitation, "has two wings on which to rise from earth, simplicity and purity. Simplicity should be in the intention, purity in the affection."

We shall better understand the depth of meaning these words contain if we reflect how often our own intentions are complex, how seldom our affections are altogether pure.

To exemplify what we mean by intention let us

take a good practical Christian life, that of a man sincerely anxious to do right, who models his life on the precepts of natural and Christian morality. He fulfils every duty of his state, deals justly with all men, devotes some portion of his time and substance to the relief of those in need, is careful not to injure his neighbour by speaking ill of him, is temperate and chaste, keeps the commandments of the Church. These are certainly virtues, and have a certain value in themselves because they cost effort and are fruitful in results.

But, if it comes to determining exactly what that value is, they must be measured by the agent's intention; in other words, by the motives or motive which prompted his actions. For without so much as considering those motives that may be called bad, which of their very nature vitiate actions not evil in themselves, there are different degrees of worth in motives that have respectable qualities in common. In speaking to Christians I may class these better motives under the following heads: good natural inclinations, fear of future retribution, hope of eternal rewards, an abstract sense of duty, self-respect, the love of God.

Every one of these motives is good in itself, but all have not the same value; and it is precisely on this difference of value that the work and progress of the spiritual, or interior life hang. The sole business of the interior life is to simplify, to raise the intention, to purify the affections by detaching them more and more from inferior motives, to bring them into subordination to the one motive that is

superior to the rest. This superior motive is to be found in the love of God, Who is Himself *the* infinite Good, and to love Whom is to love duty at its source, in its substantial reality, is to love the moral perfection that surpasses duty, is to correspond to the one only Love that never leads to excess, never draws astray, the love that keeps for its own the prerogative of containing, of developing, of purifying all subordinate motives.

Let us prove this, taking these motives one by one. The love of God develops the desire, the hope of future reward, because God Himself is that reward; it contains and develops the dread of eternal punishment, for the greatest of all punishments is that of losing God. But, in this aspect, the hope of reward ceases to be mercenary; there is no looking out for wages, no calculating self-interest determining a certain ratio of work to be paid with a reward of infinite price. It is the very heart's yearning to be united to the Beloved. And so with the dread of eternal punishment: it is not here the mere natural horror of physical suffering, but love shrinking from the very thought of eternal separation from the Beloved, from that of for ever blaspheming and offending Him instead of for ever blessing and pleasing Him.

Again, this love contains, stimulates the noble ambition for moral perfection, transmuting it into the desire to become the image of the Beloved. And this desire it purifies, banishing from the soul the self-complacency that claims for itself what love generously ascribes to the Beloved.

But human life has its passive, as well as its active side. Patience, in other words the virtue of suffering well, may, however, proceed from a variety of very dissimilar motives. Men may proudly submit in order to show themselves superior to the strokes of misfortune, or acquiesce because they know resistance to be useless, or because they think the blow will fall lighter if they bend under it, or they submit with a sullen kind of resignation because they know that formal rebellion is a sin against God for which He will call them to account; but all the time they perhaps indulge in a semi-murmuring discouragement not very remote from the sin of despair.

But there is also the submission born of love. And just as activity may be intermittent, and the will be all the time fixed to one purpose, so suffering, possessing, while it lasts, a certain character of permanency, demands continuity of submission. Exterior acts are the pattern worked into the tissue of life; the tissue itself is a composition of dispositions and sentiments, and this explains what is meant by the "interior life." It is the habitual state, the temperature, the breath, as it were, of the soul. The only standard by which the soul's worth is measurable, therefore, is the worth of its love, and the one important question in the moral life is entirely one of love, of the love of God. There is no other foundation on which Christian virtue can be built, whether it be the sanctity that mounts to the very pinnacles of heroism, or the virtue that seems hardly to rise

above the level of earth—to be Christian at all, it must spring from the love of God.

His *Treatise on the Love of God* is the most important book St Francis wrote. It is a very deep, a very solid one, but the author's learning, his patient research, are veiled in such beautiful language that it is anything but a dull or heavy book. It has, moreover, the quite unconscious merit of letting us into the Saint's secrets; it tells us both what made him a Saint and how he compassed the gigantic tasks he set himself to do.

Let us, therefore, venture with him at least as far as the shores of that glorious region which he penetrated deeper than we can hope to follow him, taking for our guide his beautiful treatise and hoping that it may bring us to at least a somewhat clearer vision of the love of God, teach us how it is planted in the soul, how nourished, how made strong.

II

It must be kept in mind that the virtue that springs from the love of God is not that natural or philosophic virtue which a man thinks he can acquire by his own efforts. It is supernatural and Christian; and to rise to it, the human will must be "prevented" and supported by Divine Grace.

The first thing a Christian moralist is called upon to do, is to try and find out exactly what the human will can, and cannot do, in regard to the love of God — points upon which we shall find the psychology of St Francis especially instructive.

Original sin, he tells us, has not deprived the soul of a certain natural inclination to love God above all other things—a natural inclination that is the inevitable corollary of the mental process that affirms God to be the Sovereign Good. "Our hearts are hatched, so to speak, under nature's wings, fed, reared among things corporeal, base, transitory; but, nevertheless, at the first glimmering sight and knowledge of God, the natural and primal inclination to love Him, which lay hidden and dormant before, at that instant suddenly awakes, flashes up like a spark out of ashes, and, touching the will, gives it an impetus towards that supreme love which is due to the Sovereign Lord and Principle of all things.[1]

This natural inclination is so strongly indicated in the nobler heathen philosophers—such as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Epictetus, that, in the absence of any other instructing principle, we find some of them defining the primary moral duty to be the love of God. But unless the grace of God assists this good inclination, it remains a barren sentiment. Taught by experience as well as theology, we know that, of himself, man is powerless to love God above all things. "Our poor, miserable nature, injured by sin," says St Francis, "is like the palms that are brought here from foreign lands. They produce something, indeed, but nothing perfect—attempts only, as it were. For trees that bear perfect, properly flavoured, ripe dates, we must go to hotter climates. Now, this is like the human heart

[1] *Traité de l'Amour de Dieu.* L. i., chap. xvi.

which, indeed, most naturally produces some beginnings of the love that tends towards God; but the love that loves Him above all things, and is the true maturity of the love due to Him who is the Sovereign Good, belongs only to hearts animated and assisted by heavenly grace, and in a state of perfect charity. And that small, imperfect love, of which even nature feels the inward stirring, is nothing but a certain willing without willing, a will that wills and does not will, a barren will producing no effects, a paralytic will that sees the waters of holy love and is too infirm to cast itself into them." [1]

What then? Is this natural inclination a mockery? Shall we find fault with nature because, making us thirsty, she is not able to give us the priceless drink that alone can quench the thirst? Oh no! "God uses" the natural inclination "as a handle, of which He lays hold to draw us out of ourselves. And we, for our part, see in it the sign and record of our First Principle and Creator, to the love of whom it urges us by the secret admonition that we belong to Him. And being faithful in the use of this natural inclination, the sweetness of Divine pity comes to our aid and helps us on to something more; and as we co-operate with this beginning of Divine assistance, God, in His Fatherly goodness, helps us still further, leading us on from good to better, until at last we come to that sovereign love to which natural inclination urges us." [2]

But natural inclination, not only too infirm to

[1] *Traité de l'Amour de Dieu.* L. ii., chap. xxvii.
[2] *Ibid.* L. i., chap. xxviii.

change itself into free effective love, went groping in the dark without light to find Him it sought, until again God intervened. "The heart, having long been moved by this natural inclination towards the Sovereign Good, yet knew not whither it was being drawn. A deep and secret inclination moved it to tend and pretend in its every action towards felicity; but it went hither and thither with uncertain step, seeking, but not knowing either where felicity was to be found nor in what it consisted; until Faith, appearing, made known to it both where happiness is and what its infinite marvels are. And then how did the poor human heart rejoice, having found the treasure it sought, how filled was it with content, how satisfied with love." [1]

This is the co-operation of God and man; God's part, if we may venture so to express ourselves, is to give us light to see what is truly good; strength not to fall under our own weight; to prevent us, rouse us by the whisper of His inspirations, that we may become supernaturally capable of that of which by nature we are not capable. And all this God does when, and in the measure, we permit Him: "For the measure in which our heart dilates itself, or rather lets itself be dilated and enlarged, and does not deny the void of its consent to the Divine Mercy, in the same measure the Divine Mercy always pours into it, sheds over it, an increasing and ever increasing inspiration under which we also increase, growing more and more in holy

[1] *Traité de l'Amour de Dieu.* L. ii., chap. xv.

love. But directly the void is filled, when we consent no longer, the inspiration ceases." [1]

Man's part is to accept the gift that is always being offered, but which, to have effect, must be accepted. If accepted only in limited measure, the effect will be proportionately limited ; if accepted in the full measure of its virtue, its operation will be wide as itself: "Full the stream may be, but it brings much or little water to the garden according to the size of the conduit that carries it there." [2]

But whence comes it that such a gift can ever be refused, and that while, on His side, God never fails man, man on his, often fails God ? Because we are free: "Grace in nowise forces or obliges our free will ; God does indeed, with the potent touch of His all-merciful hand, surround and bind the soul by frequent inspiration, by warnings and attractions, but the human will is left, nevertheless, at liberty and perfectly free. Grace lays hold so graciously of our hearts to attract them, that the liberty of our will is in nowise injured. It works potently indeed, but so suavely that, amidst all the forces it brings to bear on us, we can still resist, still refuse to comply." [3]

The love of God is then an accepted grace and inspiration. Now, of its very nature, the supreme love of God, when it enters the soul, excludes all deliberate affection to sin, for the two things cannot subsist together in the same soul; and this being

[1] *Traité de l'Amour de Dieu.* L. i., chap. xvi.
[2] *Ibid.* L. i., chap. xvi. [3] *Ibid.* L. ii., chap. xii.

so, the love of God necessarily implies and produces repentance and the resolve to live virtuously; a repentance not half-hearted or that springs even from such considerations as the fear of eternal punishment, the hope of eternal reward, or from the mere æsthetic horror of the ugliness of sin and an artistic attraction to the beauty of goodness; for although these are all reasonable, laudable, practical considerations of their kind, beginnings of wisdom not at all incompatible with the superior motive of love, even steps towards it, they have not the love of God in them. Beginnings only, they must be passed beyond: "For the beginning of things that are good, is good as a beginning; progress, as progress, is better; but to wish to finish a work at the beginning or in its progress, is reversing the order of things. The only perfection of repentance is love." [1]

Now, it is towards this perfection of repentance that we must tend, both in our resolutions as regards the future, and our regrets for the past; our progress in the spiritual life consisting in purifying our resolutions and regrets from the dross of inferior sentiments, until by the continual and growing inspiration of Divine Grace on the one hand, and the faithful correspondence on the other of our accepting will, the kingdom of charity be established, built up, and strengthened in our souls; that charity which is "like the sun shining over the soul and making it beautiful by his rays, over the spiritual faculties to bring them to perfec-

[1] *Traité de l'Amour de Dieu.* L. ii., chap. xix.

tion, over the natural ones to moderate them, but over the will as if at home there, to make it love and cherish God above all things." [1]

But this sun has a dawn, a season, when "the Holy Spirit sheds the first early rays of light, the first sensations of vital heat into our souls"—and it is "a delight to see that sun of virtue, as, little by little, with degrees of progress that imperceptibly become perceptible, he goes shedding his light over the soul, not ceasing until he covers it with the glory of his presence. Oh! how bright, beautiful, lovely and pleasant is that dawn." [2]

But the daylight that succeeds the dawn is not the term of progress: there is no term. The created heart, limited in all its powers, can never love God with the infinite fulness of love due to Him. It is of the heart's very condition to be always less than its object, when that object is the infinite God, but, on the other hand, it has, by the grace of God, the privilege of perpetually growing. "To love God with a love equal to the Divine goodness, the heart must have an infinitely good will; but, except in God, no will is infinitely good. In us, then, charity may be perfected so far as infinity, but not to the further side of it." [3]

This is, in fact, the formulary of indefinite perfectibility in the moral order; a chimera, if understood as evolutionary perfectibility governed by a fatal law; but a sublime reality in the sense really

[1] *Traité de l'Amour de Dieu.* L. ii., chap. xxii.
[2] *Ibid.* L. ii., chap. xiii.
[3] *Ibid.* L. iii., chap. i.

belonging to it, of a law imposing the obligation of free choice, a law that none may evade without being called to account.

III

Two chapters of the *Traité*, the one as radiantly luminous as the other is sombre, are devoted—the first to the growth of Divine love in the faithful soul —the second to its gradual fading and decay in the soul that has treated the Divine gift carelessly, that has been at no pains to put to good use the talent intrusted to it. Our limits prevent our studying these chapters closely, and I shall attempt only to indicate the effects love produces, first on the sentiments of the heart and the resolutions formed by the will, then on the habitual attitude and character of the soul that lives under its rule, and lastly, on the virtues called "social," which, we are told, disappear to make place for the love of God.

An entire book of the *Traité* is devoted to describing the sentiments that spring up in the heart from the love of God.

Love, ever delighting in the contemplation of what it loves, always wishes, nay more, longs, that the Beloved may have everything that is good, and to be desired; and these two essential motions of love are called *complacence* and *benevolence*.

Now, when God is the object of love, the heart, bathed "as if in a sea whose waters are all perfection, all goodness," finds, turn its contemplations where it may, no limit to that sacred complacence which, "tasting sweetness," hungers still; "for the

enjoyment of that good which always pleases and never fades; which is for ever being renewed, for ever flowering afresh," is not like that of finite good, "which terminates desire by enjoyment, and takes away enjoyment when it gives desire, and cannot be both enjoyed and desired at the same time."[1]

All this is quite comprehensible, but how is it with regard to love's second motion, that of benevolence? "We cannot, with a true desire, desire any good thing for God; because His goodness is infinitely more perfect than we can either know or desire it to be, and all things good are ever present to Him. No doubt, could we suppose Him to want any good thing, we should never cease wishing Him to have it, were it at the price of our lives, our being, or all the world contains." But all this we feel to be "an imagination of that which is impossible; and presently we love this impossibility of being able to desire Him anything, because its cause is the immensity of His own abundance." But in yet another way may our knowledge of God, and of His infinite perfections, be reconciled with the *benevolence* which springs naturally from love:

"Considering that there is nothing we can do to make God greater in Himself, we desire to make Him greater in ourselves; that is to make greater and greater the complacence we take in the Divine goodness. And in order to do this the soul is careful to deprive itself of all other pleasures, the better to be able to exercise itself in pleasing God. And,

[1] *Traité de l'Amour de Dieu.* L. v., chaps. i., iii.

if, being in this holy state of affection, it come across creatures, be they no matter how excellent, the soul lingers with them only in so far as they aid it and help it in its desire."[1]

Hence also springs the intense desire to honour God with praise infinite, eternal like Himself; the desire that He should be everywhere "blessed, exalted, praised, honoured and adored ever more and more" by ourselves and by all that has heart and voice to unite with, and make up for, the insufficiency of ours.

Here our Saint rises or is raised above himself. The last five chapters of the *Traité* are a hymn of sublime praise, the whole creation's praise of its Divine Author. Beginning with things visible, all of which, each after its own manner, *enarrant gloriam Dei*, he mounts to man, nature's interpreter and pontiff; then from man on earth to the saints and angels in Heaven; then from the concerts of the Court of Heaven to "the most Holy Virgin, who, being raised above all others, renders greater praise than all the rest of creatures." Then rising still higher, he "invites the Saviour Himself to praise and glorify His Eternal Father with all the benedictions that His filial love can find to bless Him with; and then the spirit comes to a Place of Silence where we know not what to do but stand in admiration."[2] And in fact, at this point, we who read may, with all reverent proportion, apply to his own burning and magnificent language those

[1] *Traité de l'Amour de Dieu.* L. v., chap. vi., vii.

[2] *Ibid.* L. v., chap. viii.-xii.

words, for we know not indeed what else to do but "stand in admiration."

Upon the elementary principle of absolute conformity to the Will of God, whether manifested in the natural or in the revealed law, we need not dwell; but on one point we would lay some stress. In the soul that loves God, this obedience is an act of love, and over and above the trouble it imposes on itself in order to obey, it adds this further trouble, it makes itself love the commandment for the sake of Him who commands. And this added trouble, we remark, instead of increasing the original weight of the trouble, diminishes it. "Some there are who keep the commandments as people gulp down their medicines, more because they are afraid of dying in condemnation, than because they delight in living in the manner that pleases the Saviour. But, as there are some people who feel a repugnance to taking medicine, no matter how pleasant to the taste, just because it is called medicine, so are there souls who have a horror of things commanded, just because they are commanded. But, contrary to this, the loving soul loves the commandments, and the harder the thing commanded, the more sweet, the more agreeable is it to it, because so much the more will it please the Beloved, so much greater honour will it render Him. Such a soul walks on with bounding step, singing hymns of joy when God shows it His commandments and justifications. And, like the pilgrim who goes gaily singing while he travels, adding to the labour of travelling, indeed, that of singing,

yet by that addition relieving himself and lightening the toil of his way, so the holy lover finds such sweetness in God's commandments, that nothing in this mortal life gives him the same strength of breath, the same relief as this gracious burden of the precepts of his God."[1]

Next, a few words on conformity to the Will of God in the *counsels*. Not, of course, the foolhardy conformity that does not take into consideration that every counsel is not meant for every soul, and which, without reflecting on the particular conditions of its own case, without knowing whether it be called to follow the counsels at all, rushes headlong into the midst of them. This kind of foolhardiness, St Francis, always as wise as he is zealous, condemns, not only on the score of imprudence, but as opposed to the purity of the love that is due to God. "For the loving heart does not receive a counsel to use it for its own sake, but to conform to the will of Him who counsels. And therefore it receives all the counsels in no other manner but that in which God wills. And it is not His will that everyone should observe them all, but those only which are proper according to diversity of persons, times, occasions, strength, and as charity may require."[2]

But this is not to be understood as meaning that because the soul is not called upon to follow this or that counsel, it can dispense with all concern in the counsels; for being the conditional Will of

[1] *Traité de l'Amour de Dieu.* L. viii., chap. v.
[2] *Ibid.* L. viii., chap. vi

God, the counsels deserve respect and affection; and the soul that is not called upon to fulfil any of them, should at least hold in respect both them and those who are called.[1]

Under this rule of love, Christian society is organised on a system of mutual harmony: its needs are supplied, its offices filled, and every man is at the post God has assigned to him. Some are priests, some religious, because God has called them to the Sanctuary or the Cloister; others for the same reason live in the world under the ordinary conditions of public and domestic life; and these latter conform also to the evangelical counsels as well as precepts—in the first place by not thrusting themselves into places where they have not been called; in the second, by duly honouring the higher states of life, by furthering to the utmost of their power the holy vocations of other souls; finally, family life itself becomes a nursery, a training school for the priesthood, an atmosphere in which vocations grow and are fostered by parents who love God too generously to grudge Him what He takes for His own.

Next comes conformity to God's Will in trial and suffering: "Opening the arms of our consent, let us lovingly embrace them, let us acquiesce in His Most Holy Will, singing to Him as the hymn of our eternal acquiescence, *Thy Will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.* Yes, Lord, *Thy Will be done on earth*, where we have no pleasure without some mingling of grief, no rose without thorns, no day

[1] *Traité de l'Amour de Dieu.* L. viii., chap ix.

that night does not follow, no spring that winter has not gone before; *on earth*, Lord, where consolations are rare and toils innumerable. O God, Thy Will be done, nevertheless, not only in keeping Thy commandments, following Thy counsels and inspirations as should all, but also in the pains and afflictions that come on us so that *Thy Will* may do in us, for us, with us, whatever it please."[1] And this has to be achieved to the letter. We have to learn to love suffering that God sends, and if at first the task be beyond us, we must at least so incline; and that not in a vague, indefinite way, as if stretching towards something we know to be out of our reach, but as towards something we know we can and shall, by God's grace reach.

And does all this mean that things are to be denaturalised? Are pains of body and mind, the couch of agony, the cruellest of surgical operations, the loss of friends, fortune, reputation, treachery in those most trusted, are all these things not to be considered evils? Are we to go back to the old paradox of the Stoics, and call all such accidents, *matters of indifference?* And if we did, how would that help us to love them? The Stoic was in the wrong when he said pain was not an evil; how, therefore, and why, is the Christian in the right when, with apparently greater paradox, he says pain is an evil, but can and must be loved.

St Francis thus explains this paradox: "Look at tribulations in themselves; they are things to fear and dread, not to love. But look at them in their

[1] *Traité de l'Amour de Dieu.* L. ix., chap. i.

origin, that is, in the Divine Will and Providence which ordains them; they are infinitely amiable, they are things to love and delight in." Then, taking a comparison from Pliny, for the zoological value of which I should be sorry to have to vouch, he goes on: "There is said to be in Bœotia a river in which all the fish look golden, but directly you take them out of the water they belong to, they are the colour of other fish. Now, afflictions are like those fish; if we take them outside God's Will, we find them bitter; but if we take them in that good, eternal pleasure of God, they are made of gold, are more lovable, more precious than words can tell." [1]

This is the supreme degree of that *holy* indifference which our Saint not only taught but practised, and on which we dwelt in a former chapter. But there is still an aspect of the virtue to which no words but his own will do justice.

Even in the progress of the spiritual life he would have us practise this virtue so to acquire that tranquillity of courage which shall make us valiant, and free us of that indiscreet, presumptuous kind of zeal which lapses into discouragement under delay. In the interior life, as well as the exterior, *Fais ce que dois* ought never to be separated from *advienne ce que pourra*, for nothing *can* happen but just what God wills to happen. But St Francis shall explain:

"God has ordered us to do everything we can to acquire very holy virtue; let us therefore forget

[1] *Traité de l'Amour de Dieu.* L. ix., chap. ii.

nothing that may ensure the success of the holy enterprise we have undertaken. But, after we have planted and watered, we must also not forget that it is God's part to give the increase to the trees of our good inclinations and habits; and we must wait on His Divine Providence for the fruit of all our desires and labours. And if we be not sensible of such advance and progress of our minds in the devout life as we should wish, let us yet not be troubled, let us abide in peace, so that tranquillity may always reign in our hearts. It is our part to cultivate our souls well, and therefore we must apply ourselves faithfully to the task; but, as to the abundance of the harvest, that we must leave to the care of our Lord. The husbandman will not be scolded because the ingathering is small, but he certainly will be if he has not worked and put seed into the ground. Do not let us worry ourselves because we seem always to be novices in the exercise of virtues, for, in the Monastery of the Devout Life, each thinks himself always a novice, and life itself is the time of probation.

"True, some one may say to me, but if I know it to be my own fault that I make no progress in virtue, how can I help being anxious and unhappy? I answer, that we must be sorry for all the faults we commit, and our repentance must be strong, calm, constant, tranquil, not turbulent, anxious, discouraged. You know that you are hindered in the path of virtue by your own fault? Oh, then! humble yourself before God, beseech Him

to have mercy on you, throw yourself on His goodness, ask Him to forgive you; confess your fault, cry for mercy to Him, through the ear of your confessor, to receive absolution. But, having done this, be at peace; detesting your offences, be thankful for the abjection you feel because of your small progress towards what is good." [1]

This is, then, the ever ascending moral plane on which man rises by Divine love. Let us, for a few moments, consider how his character and habitual temperament are affected by such conditions. We shall be met at once by strange and mysterious things.

The *Via regia sanctæ crucis* lies before us, the royal road, that is so filled with trials that none suffer more, none longer, than those who enter it. Sometimes, as in the case of our Saint, this suffering assumes the form of agonised terror of the eternal future; a terror that, in spite of Christian hope, in spite of reason, grows darker and darker. Sometimes the soul is beaten down by the temptation to discouragement, because results are so disappointingly disproportionate to efforts. Or in the absence of all spiritual consolation, the round of daily duty becomes distasteful, sacrifice joyless, unrewarded, the soul cries out to its God and He turns a deaf ear. In this distress it is, as it were, a land without water, parched by a burning sun that gives no light, swept by the relentless winds of the desert. These are the seasons of aridity which all the Saints have

[1] *Traité de l'Amour de Dieu.* L. ix., chap. vii.

known, and which, in St Teresa's case, lasted ten years.

But it is just in these appalling seasons of desolation that the union of the human will with the Divine, shines conspicuous in all the supernatural and austere beauty of its sustaining merit. The soul does not see where God is leading; it knows only that it is He who is leading. It is sorrowful, even unto death; the whole inferior nature cries out for mercy, asks that the chalice may be removed. And, says Francis, this is all right enough, provided only that at its very *point* and *summit*, the soul says, as the last word of all: *Non mea voluntas, sed Tua fiat.* The very joy it had been accustomed to experience and feel when it did battle under the approving eye of God is gone; it feels nothing now, not even—and this is the supreme trial—that it still is beloved of God. "Thus it sometimes happens that we have no consolation in the exercises of holy love, and, like deaf men singing, cannot hear our own voices, nor take any pleasure in the sweetness of our own songs; but, on the contrary, we are oppressed with a thousand fears, troubled with a thousand noises that the enemy rattles round our hearts, suggesting to us, now, that we are no longer pleasing to our Master, now, that all our love is profitless, or false, or empty. . . . And though, indeed, faith residing in the summit of our mind, assure us that the trouble is only for a time, yet so great is the noise the enemy makes, so loud does he shout in the other part of our soul, that we can hardly

hear the advice and remonstrances of faith; and nothing dwells in the imagination but this sad foreboding: Alas! I shall never again be happy."[1]

But the more tempest-tossed the soul, the greater the hold that darkness and desolation have on its inferior part, the firmer must be its confidence. Of course if our Saint had meant the kind of confidence on which the heart feeds with sensible satisfaction, he would simply have asked an impossibility. But he asks for a very different and much greater thing—a virtue, an act of faith that the will can and must produce. "For" he says to his daughters of the Visitation, "if you make such acts without any satisfaction, any delight in them, our Lord loves them all the better; and if you are afraid you are perhaps making them only with your lips, take comfort; the lips would not speak if the heart did not choose."

Now, this may be difficult, but is possible, and is the only way to get rid of the anxiety and sadness which, born, the latter of the former, perpetually react one on the other, and hinder the progress of the soul. St Francis was always waging war against this kind of spiritual wretchedness, and seems almost to have composed the "*Introduction à la vie dévote*" on purpose to combat it. "No greater misfortune," he tells us, "with the exception of sin, can befall the soul than this anxiety. It is like the introduction of sedition and disturbance into a Republic, incapacitating it to resist attack from outside. The troubled, anxious heart loses the necessary strength to hold

[1] *Traité de l'Amour de Dieu.* L. ix., chap. ii.

fast the virtues it had already won, and, in the same proportion, to resist the temptations of the enemy. This wrong sadness produces unregulated fears, disgust of prayer; it dulls and overwhelms the brain, deprives the soul of counsel, resolution, courage, lays all its forces low; is, in a word, like a hard winter that cuts off the beauty of the earth and numbs living things; for it robs the soul of sweetness, cripples it, weakens it in every faculty." [1]

The malady having been described in these graphic words, the proper remedies are carefully prescribed; and then we are told that, should they seem not to work at once, all we have to do is to wait, and that, sooner or later, relief will come, the soul meantime, detached from self and everything else but God, remaining calm, and more than calm—joyous, for its peace, its joy, are not passing sentiments that go and come with every wind that blows, but solid virtues, the fruits of love.

And, marvel of marvels, this detachment from creatures produces devotion to them, love of them. As the sun draws the waters of seas and rivers to itself, to turn them into vapour and send them back to earth in the shape of fructifying rains, so with the love of God. He desires man's whole heart for Himself, and, when He has it for His own, having filled and dilated it with His love, enriched it from the immensity of His own treasure, sends it back to pour itself out on mankind.

St Francis enlarged on this idea, expressing the wish that some "servant of God" would write a

[1] *Introduction à la vie dévote.* Part iv., chaps. xi., xii.

whole book about it, unconscious (as God's Saints always are unconscious of such things) that this book was being written day by day, palpably, gloriously, in his own life.

IV

In the *Introduction à la vie dévote* also, he had written down much that such a book should contain. This gem of Christian philosophy, and of literature as well, has been, and still is, more widely read than any book of devotion except the "Imitation." But re-read in the light of the particular doctrine we have just been studying, the unity, the spirit and lofty purpose of the work will be understood as perhaps never before. Nor should the reader fail particularly to remark our Saint's application of this sublime doctrine to souls which must work out their salvation in the world. "Charity," he says, "never comes into the soul without bringing her train of virtues with her, all of which she moves and exercises as occasion requires, as a captain his soldiers. But she does not set them all to work at once, nor in the same degree, or time, or place. The just man, like the tree planted by the water-course, brings forth his fruit in season."[1]

The argument, so to speak, of the whole book is this: first, the principle, the source, the mainspring, the regulator—that is, *love*; next, virtues that are love's offspring and of kindred features, the virtues that come into the soul with love—"its train," as he calls them—virtues whose relative functions and

[1] *Introduction à la vie dévote.* Part iii., chap. i.

operations are regulated by the wise law of inspired love.

The book is one that everyone must lose something by not reading. It is an analysis of the moral life such as only a hand, long practised in dealing with souls, could make: critical, virile, infinitely tender and compassionate, vigorous, stimulating. Practical, of course, and elevated; the mediocre, the merely tolerable has no place at all in it; but though the standard of perfection is offered, and of growing perfection, yet it takes the soul as it finds it, the everyday ordinary soul at the foot of the mountain, burdened with every commonest weakness, and while demanding sacrifice, shows how the sacrifice is to be made and how sweetness may be extracted from it.

The title of the book is descriptive of its aim: the formation of the virtue that is, and ought to be, the mother virtue or principle of every other, that of devotion.

The very words *devotion* and *devout*, thanks to the scoffing scepticism of the last, and even of this century, have lost their meaning to many ears, especially in France; but in their true sense we could hardly find nobler. Devotion is the votive offering of self to God, and for His sake, to man; a thing that has no kind of affinity with sickly and divided sentimentalism.

There is, indeed, plenty of spurious devotion; not only that of the downright hypocrite who does not deceive himself nor attempt to deceive God, but also the devotion that, contenting itself with ex-

terior practices, never penetrates to the core of the matter, to the "spirit and truth" which make it living and give it unity. "Everyone," says St Francis, "paints devotion according to his own whim or liking. The man who is addicted to fasting thinks himself very devout if he fasts with a heart full all the time of rancour; and, though he trembles at the very idea of wetting his tongue with wine, or even water, he does not hesitate to wet it with his neighbour's blood by slandering and calumniating him. Another will esteem himself very devout because he says a great many prayers every day, while with the same tongue he speaks proud, angry, arrogant words to his servants and neighbours. Another is always ready to pull money out of his purse to give alms, but draws no gentleness out of his heart when he ought to forgive his enemies. Another forgives his enemies, but never pays his creditors until the law forces him. And such people as these are vulgarly thought devout, but are not."[1]

What, then, is true devotion? "It presupposes the love of God; is, in fact, nothing but the true love of God; and that not of a kind or sort, but a love that has made some progress in the perfection towards which it makes us carefully, frequently, and promptly operate. This love is no other thing than a certain spiritual equability and vivacity, rendering us not only prompt and diligent to fulfil all God's commandments; but, going further, provokes us to do all the good works we can, and to do them promptly, affectionately; those also that are not

[1] *Introduction à la vie dévote.* Part i., chap i.

commanded, but are only of inspiration or counsel. If charity be a plant, devotion is its blossom; if a precious stone, devotion is its brilliancy; if a balm, devotion is the sweetness of its odour." [1]

It may be ambitious to aim so high. But the invitation is of one higher than Francis. Our Lord himself says: "Be you perfect," but adds, "My yoke is sweet, my burden light." And His words are intended not for a few chosen spirits, but for all. Devotion is not the virtue of the cloister only; all must be devout. Now this is just what St Francis teaches in the *Introduction*, which was written for people "living in towns, in families, at Court," to show them that "the valiant, constant soul may live in the world and contract none of its humour; fly among the flames of earthly desires, and not burn the wings of the heavenly desires of the devout life. It is then an error, even a heresy, to wish to banish the devout life from the regiment of soldiers, the booth of the artisan, the court of the prince, the household of the married. Devotion, when it is the true kind of devotion, does nothing any harm, but, on the contrary, perfects everything; and a devotion that cannot be made to fit into the legitimate vocation of no matter whom, is only a false devotion." [2]

Upon one point the *Introduction* insists at the outset. St Francis was himself so incomparable as a director of conscience, had guided so vast a multitude of souls in the road of perfection (we

[1] *Introduction à la vie dévote.* Part i., chap. xii.
[2] *Ibid.* Part i.

need hardly remind the reader that, at least as a secondary cause, the Visitation owes its existence to the exercise of this function) that no one was better able to appreciate the importance of direction in the spiritual life. The soul, he tells us, "that is starting on the holy journey of devotion, stands in need of a faithful friend to guide its actions by his advice and counsels, so to escape the snares and ambushes of the evil one." [1]

Now, why is it the soul wants a director, having conscience for a guide? Does it not seem like a sort of sacrilegious dethronement of conscience to submit to any other direction, to hand oneself over, as it were, to other guidance? And shall not we deteriorate into mere blind and irresponsible machines if we allow ourselves to be moved by an exterior force?

The theory of direction is the best possible answer to these objections and scruples.

And first of all, conscience is a guide, a light, the voice of God Himself. But a guide subject to many misleading influences, a light dimmed by every change of an atmosphere that is never in one stay, a voice drowned by the clamour of many conflicting sounds. Hence arise spiritual dilemmas, moments when the soul has to decide between what appear to be opposing duties, either of which can be accomplished only at the cost of the other. There are spiritual trials which, in an age almost totally given up to exterior things, will hardly be understood; trials, risks, dangers

[1] *Introduction à la vie dévote.* Part i., chap. iv.

to which the inexperienced soul particularly is liable; illusions that assume the guise of inspirations, inspirations that a cowardly weakness would fain believe to be illusions.

So long as the path is the beaten one, the road clear and plainly marked, while evil looks like what it is, and good is not hidden under a veil, in these conditions conscience neither encounters nor even so much as anticipates any such torturing perplexities, never supposes that it will be overtaken by the dark. But the road takes an unexpected turn, revealing cross roads, or it seems to come to an end altogether; night comes on, and conscience has to confront the fact that it has lost its way, that it cannot distinguish right from wrong, the path of wisdom from the path of folly, and this very often when, in the case of some one else, it would be quite capable of giving very good advice.

Nor is the moral life like a military parade or a review, for which every movement has been over and over again rehearsed, until the soldier knows exactly what his commanding officer will order him to do. It is a march, ought to be a progress, but in most cases is nothing of the kind. What most of us do is to turn round and round in the same circle of faults, and when we do leave any behind it is simply to replace them by those of another period of life; all the time, too, there is the same background of interior faults, those common to human nature, or those of our own nature in particular. In point of fact the only kind of progress we make, is often nothing better than an accidental truce due to circumstances.

Now all this is not only because we want courage to advance, but because we also want light. I remember hearing a bishop once say of a lady in his diocese: "She wants to be pious but she does not know how to *go at it*," a homely phrase that puts the case into a nutshell. How to *go at it* is the *crux* of the situation and the thing we have to be taught.

A necessity of spiritual advancement, this teaching has brought into existence a whole class of writings which have as their aim the formation, the direction of conscience. But books speak only generally, and every life has its own particularities. What each wants, when he once knows the abstract rule, is how to apply it to his own individual case. All kinds of philosophers, false as well as true, have assumed the office of direction and given advice; Socrates and Seneca and Michelet himself. There is even a kind of mutual direction between friends who take friendship, with all its duties, seriously; between husbands and wives who want to help one another to grow better; and just in proportion to the goodness, generosity of intention, soundness of judgment, experience on one side, and candour on the other, does this sort of direction prove profitable. But if this purely natural direction be more or less useful, how much more useful must be direction that is essentially Christian, the direction of a Priest fitted for the office by special graces and illuminations, intimately acquainted with the principles that are the very foundation of the moral life. These special graces must not be overlooked in what is

technically known as direction. The tie between director and directed must, St Francis says, "be a friendship all divine, all spiritual." And, because of the immense importance of finding a guide "according to God's own Heart," we ought very earnestly to pray to God for "help in our search. Nor doubt that were it necessary to send an angel down from Heaven as He did to the young Tobias, He will give you a good and faithful guide. And indeed, to you, it ought always to be an angel that is sent —that is, when found, consider him, not as a mere man; do not trust in that at all, nor in his human knowledge, but trust God, Who will indeed show favour to you, speak to you through the man, putting into his heart and mouth all that shall be required for your happiness—so that you ought to listen to him as to an angel come from Heaven to lead you there. Treat with him with an open heart, with all sincerity, very faithfully, manifesting to him clearly your good and your bad, without any feigning or dissimulating; and, by this means, your well will be examined and confirmed, your ill be corrected and remedied. Have great confidence, mingled with holy reverence, in your director; trust him with the respect of a daughter for a father, respect him with the trust of a son in a mother."[1]

But this kind of authority is a serious matter, and before giving ourselves up to it, we ought to make sure of what we are doing; for imprudent, inadequate direction is dangerous in proportion to

[1] *Introduction à la vie dévote.* Part i., chap. iv

the value of good. "And for that reason choose a director—in one among a thousand, Avila says,—but among ten thousand I say. He must be full of charity, knowledge, prudence. If he be one of these three without the other two, it will be dangerous. But again I tell you, ask him of God, and when he is obtained of His Divine Majesty, keep him, seeking no other, but going on in simplicity, humbly, trustfully, for the voyage is sure to be prosperous."[1]

The director found, the work begins by clearing the ground; for the *Introduction à la vie dévote* supposes a soul still in a state of bondage to sin and anxious to be free. Writing from the standpoint of a Christian priest, the author shows how this is to be done: how the soul is to be purified from everything antagonistic to God, freed from all affection, not only to mortal, but venial sin, even from *useless* affections; "purged" from every inclination to evil. "Some people lack seriousness, some are stubborn, some like no one's opinion but their own, some are easily roused to indignation, some prone to anger, some to love, and in fact few there are who have not some imperfection or other. But however much part and parcel of the nature, the imperfection can be counteracted and corrected by care and the application of the contrary affection. And I tell you, Philothea, this is what must be done."[2]

But this *must* notwithstanding, the majority of people deny that the task Philothea is commanded

[1] *Introduction à la vie dévote.* Part i., chap. iv.
[2] *Ibid.* Part i., chap. xxiv.

to perform is a possible one. Criminal propensities, habits of vice may, they think, be successfully combated; at any rate, it is easy enough to understand that they ought to be combated. But to set to work to make themselves over, change their natures, do away with the very things that make them themselves, is what no one can do, they think; nature, they say, is "too strong" for them, they "were made" in such or such a manner—children only, may not make such excuses, but then they are "like wax." But the people who say this kind of thing forget that if children's characters are more malleable than grown people's, neither have they at their command all the powers that their elders have—and they also forget that manliness consists, not in the strength of the habits and propensities that subdue the will, but in the strength of the will to subdue the habits and propensities.

The greatest enemy to moral reformation, to put it plainly, is *laziness*. St Francis does not argue with this miserable enemy; he only shows that there is no impossibility in the matter. "It has been discovered that bitter almond trees can be changed into sweet by only making an incision near the root to draw off the sap; and cannot we draw off our perverse inclinations in order to become better? There is no nature so wayward that by God's grace first, and then by industry and diligence, it cannot be conquered and overcome."[1]

From the first, the general character of the direction given in the *Introduction* is easy to seize;

[1] *Introduction à la vie dévote.* Part i., chap. xxix.

and it will be both interesting and instructive to pause here for a few moments to compare our Saint with some of those among the ancients who, if on very dissimilar lines, undertook also to direct consciences; particularly Seneca, whose letters to Lucilius are more like Christian direction than is any other work of antiquity.

He constantly recommends self-knowledge; and that not of a general kind as one sharing the nature of the race, but knowledge of the individual self, the interior self with all its nooks and crannies, of the individual character with the particular vices that corrupt it.

By daily self-examination was this knowledge to be attained; and this exercise, already familiar to the Pythagoreans, became, under Seneca, a more serious and exact science. "If thou seek retirement, let it be to speak to, not of, thyself. But what shalt thou say? That which men readily say of one another. Speak ill of thyself, paying particular attention to whatever thou thinkest most imperfect in thy soul.[1] From this to meditation was a natural step, not the old kind of scientific meditation to discover truth, but a new kind, having for its object the moral reformation of the interior man and which dwelt on a particular precept or counsel until it had taken hold of the reason and heart. "Let that which every day thou readest, be to thee, in some sort, a preparation against death and other scourges. And when thou shalt have gone over many lands, choose some thought

[1] Seneca, Ep. lxviii.

on which, all day long, to ruminate." This is the prelude to an exhortation to do battle to the death against every perverted inclination. "Put far from thee all passions that eat into the heart; and canst thou in no other way extirpate them, let the heart itself be torn out with them." [1]

This is the teaching of rationalism. Deeply conscious of the existence of many miseries in himself, Seneca counted on his own unassisted efforts to eradicate them; the general perversion of man's inclinations he thought of as accidental, due to external causes, not innate; something every man, by his own efforts, was capable of overcoming once and for all. "What should animate us to the reformation of our lives, is that, once acquired, this great good is never lost. Men do not unlearn virtue; once having entered the soul, it never can depart from it." [2]

The same ignorance, the same systematic illusion pervade his ascetic counsels, the conditions the Fall has stamped upon the soul that is to be reformed are nowhere recognised. That the body has to be brought into subjection, subdued, punished, that expiation is a duty, a necessity, is never dreamed of. He teaches formally that it is contrary to nature to torment the body, and that philosophy "proscribes frugality together with penance"; and though he does inculcate occasional severity to the body, it is that his disciple may have opportunities of taking his own measure, and of learning to forego things.

[1] Seneca, Ep. v. [2] Ep. l.

There are curious analogies between Christian and Stoic direction of conscience. Both start by requiring the ground to be cleared, both believe in evil as a malady to be cured, both that the first virtues exercised should be purgated, and both recommend the same processes. But the two systems altogether differ in principle and aim.

The Stoic[1] says man, by his own efforts, can raise and purify himself, and that this done the moral reformation is inadmissible. The Christian acknowledges himself weak as well as free, and humbly has recourse to divine grace, not with the idea of saving himself exertion, but to make his efforts efficacious by appealing from human infirmity to the omnipotence of the Creator. This is why the Christian prays, the Stoic not; why Christian meditation, instead of being a monologue as in Seneca, is a conversation with God, the soul's retirement into a secret silent place to converse with Him who is the truth itself, saying to Him: "*Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth*"; this is why the Christian has recourse to the Sacraments, why he is humble instead of being proud.

As to the different aims of the two systems, the Stoic is an artist who works for his own satisfaction in his handiwork, for his own pleasure in it; the Christian too is an artist, and his ideals that surpass anything the Stoic ever dreamed of; but he does not work for his own satisfaction or pleasure. His motive is the obedience he owes to One who is his Sovereign Lord and also his Father.

[1] Seneca, Ep. v.

he works to please Him and because he loves Him. Nor does a niggardly obedience to explicit commandments satisfy the zeal of his heart. He is continually pressing forwards to get nearer and nearer to the Divine Object of his love; continually looking deeper and deeper into his own heart to root out, to the last fibre, everything that is not wholly consecrated to the Lord he serves.

Two spirits, two systems, two worlds; the wisdom of the heathen, at its very best, chimerical, barren, leading nowhere; the Christian, how great a contrast to all this, and perhaps especially in the opening chapters of the *Introduction*, where the author lays the foundations on which he intends to build. But the same contrast is almost equally conspicuous in the third chapter, provided it be read in its proper order, and in the light of the preceding ones.[1] "Some of the virtues, touching which" he gives "diversity of advice," notably, charity and humility, are purely Christian, purely evangelical; others which have their more or less correct counterparts outside the pale of Christianity, become altogether Christian too under his treatment. He pours the spirit of Christianity into them, gives them a directly Christian purpose, and shows that they follow charity, the queen of virtues, into the soul, and as her *train*, take up their abode

[1] The first chapter contains "the advice and exercises required to guide the soul from its first desire for the devout life until the resolve be fully taken." The second contains "various counsels for the elevation of the soul to God by prayer and the Sacraments."

there. Grace and nature blend in these virtues; but St Francis himself shall describe their harmony, and first in regard to healthy friendships. "If you help one the other in learning, then is your friendship praiseworthy; if in the virtues, in prudence, in justice, in strengthening one another, better still." But this beautiful kind of friendship Pythagoras also taught—there is yet a higher kind. "If your mutual and reciprocal communication be all charity, all devotion, all Christian perfection — Oh God! precious indeed will your friendship be. It will be excellent, because coming from God; excellent because tending to God; excellent because God Himself is the very bond of your friendship; excellent because in God it will last eternally. Oh! how good to love on earth even as in Heaven, to learn in this world to cherish one another as we shall for ever in the next one. To my way of thinking, all friendships besides these are but shadows in comparison." [1]

There is another virtue which he preaches in common with the Stoics, a virtue on which the latter insist as containing in itself a moiety of the total sum of perfection, the virtue of patience. In this virtue by which, according to Holy Scripture, a man "possesses" his soul, there is an exquisitely written chapter in the *Introduction.* The Stoics also understood this hold on the soul, but only as the natural fruit of patience; they went no farther. St Francis does, and the following passage very fairly exemplifies the difference between the two

[1] *Introduction à la vie dévote.* Part iii., chap. xix.

spirits: "Often remind yourself that our Lord has saved us by suffering and by endurance, and that we also, in the same manner ought also to work out our salvation through sufferings and afflictions; enduring insults, contradictions and disagreeable things with all the sweetness we can."[1]

Then follows a succession of subtle and wonderfully lifelike descriptions of various kinds of patience —the patience that is very brave when the trial is something out of the common, something that attracts notice, but quite the contrary under petty annoyances and sufferings, especially when of a humiliating nature; this is to love "not the tribulation but the honour it brings"; then there is the patience (and this is an even more common kind) that accepts misfortune but not its consequences; people, that is, who are ready enough to suffer provided they may do it in their own way; then the patience that does not pity itself because it wants others to do it. He goes, in fact, through the whole round of false patience as well as of true patience with all its marked characteristics, and finally winds up where he began with counsel which contains the beginning and the end of the only consolation that really touches the soul in affliction: "Often look with the eyes of your heart on Jesus Christ, crucified, naked, blasphemed, calumniated, abandoned, and overwhelmed with every sort of weariness, of sadness and of labour; and consider that neither in quality nor quantity are your sufferings to be compared with His, and

[1] *Introduction à la vie dévote.* Chap. iii.

that never will you be able to suffer anything for Him that can be compared to what He has suffered for you." [1]

This difference between the two spirits becomes a sharp contrast in regard to the virtue of humility. When our Saint, with a charm all his own, gently ridicules the vain glory that in reality he is severely condemning, he is at one with Seneca who says much the same things. But vanity may go and pride remain—a good Stoic may make a bad Christian. True humility is an interior virtue — it does not assert itself, nor, like counterfeit humility, talk of its own demerits on purpose to attract the praise it seems to disclaim;[2] and beyond all this it breeds and develops in us the conviction that we are really miserable creatures; reminds us of what we are when we try to walk alone; shows us what we shall be if we are not supported by divine grace, if left to ourselves or our own weakness; and forbids us to think ourselves better in any way than our brethren, or to attribute to ourselves anything good there may be in us. The Christian is not called upon either not to see, or to deny the good. No lie is Christian humility

[1] *Introduction à la vie dévote.* Part iii., chap. iii.

[2] "We say often that we are nothing, that we are the very misery and refuse of the whole world, but we should feel very sore indeed if anyone took us at our word and proclaimed us at our own estimate; on the contrary, we pretend to fly, pretend to want to hide, to make others run after us and try to find us; we make as if we wanted to be the last and lowest seated at the table, but it is only that we may pass with the more honour to the top. True humility makes no pretence of being humble, and utters no humble speeches."—*Introduction à la vie dévote.* Part iii., chap. x.

or Christian anything else. But what the soul is obliged to do is simply an act of justice. It traces all good to its Source and gives the glory to Him to Whom it belongs. "Some people will not let themselves think of or consider the particular graces God has bestowed on them, for fear of vain glory and self-satisfaction, in which they certainly deceive themselves. For on the contrary, nothing is so likely to humble us before God's mercy as the multitude of His benefits; and nothing is so humbling before His justice as the multitude of our crimes against Him."[1]

But to the *Introduction* itself must be referred the reader who would learn how humility is to be reconciled with the just solicitude for the preservation of his good name which is part of an honest man's duty; how, hand in hand with charity, humility will cure us of the sin of forming hasty judgments; make us gentle to others, gentle to ourselves;[2] how living in the world and having riches, we yet may practise detachment and poverty of spirit; how and in what measure this spiritual poverty should be made effective by the practice of almsgiving, by sacrificing to the poor, time, pleasures, natural repugnances; how

[1] *Introduction à la vie dévote.* Part iii., chap. v.

[2] "Raise yourself from your falls, with great suavity of heart, humbling yourself very much before God by the avowal of your wretchedness, but without any surprise at your own fault, for what is there to be surprised at in the infirmities of infirmity, the misery of miserableness? But, nevertheless, with all your strength detest the insult you have offered to His Divine Majesty, and then with a great and very brave confidence in His mercy return to the path of virtue you had quitted."

loyalty and justice, sanctified by charity, should be the law of our social life; that the constant practice of the Presence of God, the constant turning of the mind towards Him should be our safeguard, our support; how we ought, in our spiritual life as in worldly business, to take periodical inventories, count over our gains and losses, and so make our lives progressive instead of letting them lapse into the mechanical dulness of routine. All this, and much more beside that can barely be indicated here, will be found in the *Introduction* which ought to be read, meditated, dwelt upon, for it is indeed what it claims to be, an *Introduction* to the devout life, leading not to the threshold only, but conducting the soul to the interior, to the inner sanctuary, the holy place into which mere human wisdom has never penetrated. Nor are we told only what we have to do, we are told also, and in words that kindle our courage, raise us to the task, how we are to do it. No detail is despised as too small, and yet the whole tenor of the book is to war against pettiness, narrowness, scrupulosity, a war brilliant in its tactics, victorious in its issues. If the book is exquisitely written, nice in every touch, it is also incompatibly wide, lofty, spirited. If sweetness itself, nothing could be stronger. The man who should take this little book and study it, not to sip its charm as a mere psychological or literary study, but as a disciple of its spirit and its truth, must become a saint in the world, a lovable saint who would win souls by the attraction of his own holiness—he would be, no matter what his station or

position, a model of the virtues of his state according to his trade or profession, from that of the least of artisans to the greatest of statesmen; he would be perpetually growing a better man, always improving, and when the necessity arose for any act of very great devotion, for any very great deed of heroism, he would rise to the occasion, carried on the wings of Divine love.

CHAPTER V

PREACHING

MONSIEUR DE BOISY'S reproach to his son that he preached too much will not be forgotten; and Francis, both as a priest and a bishop, certainly was lavishly generous with his sermons. On the ministry of the Word he set the very highest value; and there is abundant proof that many souls owed their conversion and sanctification to his sermons. His glorious work in the Chablais was, it will be remembered, an apostolate of the voice, for when he wrote and circulated his "tracts," it was only as the best possible means, in the face of determined resistance, of inducing the people to come and hear what he had to say.

Every year of his life the popularity of his sermons increased. At Dijon, Chambéry, Grenoble, Annecy, wherever he preached, the churches were thronged; Calvinists mingling with the crowds of Catholics who came to hear him. He could never find it in his heart to refuse to preach, and sometimes when he had already promised one sermon, would promise and preach three more on the same day, his answer to all remonstrances being: "How can I help it? It is not in me to refuse. I was made to make sermons, rather than to say no."

He was just as ready to preach to a handful of peasants as to the largest and most select audience; hitting the happy medium, it is said, between language not too popular to please the learned, and not too learned to be understood by the people. In 1604 he preached the Lent Station at Dijon, then a parliamentary town; the following year at La Roche, a village in his native Savoy.

In Paris his first sermon was, however, anything but a success. To begin with, his reputation had preceded him, and a provincial reputation was enough to prejudice Paris against him; next, his sermon itself displayed no oratorical or remarkable reasoning powers. The occasion was the Feast of St Martin, and the preacher contented himself by simply sketching the saint's life. He said afterwards that while he was preaching he heard some one near him say: "Look at him come from his mountains to mumble here; he had better have stayed there, instead of coming to bore us here, if that is all he had to say."

But there was a secret in his failure. "See," said St Vincent of Paul alluding to it afterwards, "how the saints repress nature's craving for fame and applause." Paris was the intellectual centre of the world, the audience was select, and Francis was resisting what may have been a strong temptation to display. But after this first sermon he was kinder to his audiences, and preached his very best. He was a whole year in Paris, crowds flocking all the time to hear his sermons, until at last he said to a friend, "Does it not surprise you a little that

all these worthy Parisians come to hear me preach, me whose tongue is so thick, whose ideas are so wanting in elevation, whose sermons are so flat?"

We can hardly doubt that he calumniated himself in this summary of his demerits; but, nevertheless, we vainly look for signs indicating that the sermons, which took such hold on his contemporaries, have had any corresponding influence on later generations. Into the causes of this oblivion, which stands out in such marked contrast to the fate of his other works, it will be of interest to inquire.

And to begin with a trite remark, no written speech ever has, or can have, the living force of a spoken oration; the voice, its modulations, the orator's action, all being important factors in the effect produced. To the case in point this remark is peculiarly applicable. We are for ever being reminded of the charm of St Francis' voice, of his noble gestures, of the beauty of his countenance. But these remarks are very far from going to the root of the matter. The orator's sanctity, a subtle influence emanating from his words and person, was a still more important factor. It was his own personal holiness that gave him a supernatural power of awakening emotion, of stirring to conviction. The mere presence of such a man preaches; thoughts which, coming from coarser lips, might seem almost commonplace, come from these invested with new and deeper meanings, that kindle and raise the soul to higher things. Those who followed Père de Ravignan's Retreats at Notre Dame, will understand the fervid language

in which the contemporaries of St Francis describe a somewhat similar experience. "There was," says one of them, "a certain gentle majesty in his whole manner and person, which made people conscious of being in the presence of a man of God; and it used to be said that to have an idea of Jesus Christ conversing on earth, one had but to see the Bishop of Geneva." It was what someone else called "Annecy, or rather Paradise, rhetoric."

The second reason is that St Francis has suffered the fate common to precursors. The pulpit oratory of the day was false: from the artistic point of view, because it was bombastic, artificial; from the Christian, because the precincts of the sacred were shamelessly invaded by the profane; false too in its action on souls, which it neither enlightened by its subtle arguments and hair-splitting distinctions, nor touched by calculated effects which neither came from nor appealed to the heart. But, as one of the principal authors of a movement which developed into the magnificent Christian oratory of the seventeenth century, our Saint's services ought in justice to be remembered, though the actual value of his own sermons loses by comparison with those of his successors.

A third reason may perhaps be found in the fact that preaching solely as an apostle and for the good of souls, he did not give himself the time necessary to make his sermons great works of art, to perfect them in form, in connection, in proportion. We have his other works to prove that he despised none of these æsthetic qualities, but preaching almost

every day, administering his diocese, keeping up his immense correspondence, and always, of course, faithful to his own spiritual exercises, it would have been a physical impossibility for him to devote the days and hours to his sermons which would have been necessary to work them up to the highest standards of eloquence. It satisfied him to preach with unction, to explain the Word of God in the spirit of that theology of which he was so profound a master; satisfied him if his hearers' minds were enlightened, their hearts touched, their souls converted to God; as to what posterity might think of his sermons, he concerned himself not at all.

The fact that he never wrote them, sufficiently proves this indifference to his posthumous reputation as a preacher. Not one of them was published while he was alive, and those published afterwards were taken down from his lips without any knowledge, on his part, of the proceeding. The written reports of those days, before the invention of shorthand, are never to be relied upon either for exactitude or completeness, and we can by no means be sure that we possess any one of his sermons exactly as it was spoken; while it is quite certain that, had he had any voice in the matter, not one of them would have been published exactly in its existing form. The first collection, published in 1641, in his "*Works*," was "*prepared by Commander de Sillery with the help of St Jane Frances de Chantal.*" [1]

[1] *Œuvres de St F. de Sales.* Ed. d'Annecy. Avant propos des sermons par Dom Mackey.

The written report of an improvised speech can never be much more to the speaker than a kind of rough copy requiring strict revision; and, even to the audience, in the absence of the impassioned voice and gestures, the *personality* of the orator, his speech would very likely be unrecognisable. As for himself, when he comes to revise it in cool blood, he also perhaps scarcely knows it again; he finds slips where he had intended to be witty; *non sequiturs* that were unnoticed in the enthusiasm of the moment; repetitions that, at the time, seemed absolutely necessary to bring "winged words" home to their nests, but which in print are mere prosing; and a thousand other things to be altered, corrected, added. He feels, in short, that if the speech is to be printed at all, something must be done to quicken it back into the life it seems to have lost in being transferred to paper.

Even the few sermons St Francis did commit to writing, he probably would have wished to revise before submitting them to the ordeal of print. For it is one thing to put a manuscript away in a drawer, another to offer it to the public. The writer, in the latter case, becomes his own critic. He first revises and corrects his manuscript, then his proofs, and does not finally launch his ship until he feels he has done his best, and can only do harm by further meddling.

Let us not, therefore, be disappointed that our Saint's sermons in their existing forms have lost the popular charm they had while he was alive, nor should we expect to find in them the skilful arrange-

ment, the perfections of style to which our great modern preachers have accustomed us. But it will not be in vain, nevertheless, to study them; they are interesting as giving, in a somewhat freer manner than has been attempted in the preceding chapter, a very good idea, though in a somewhat fragmentary form, of his theological teaching; and they bring him before us in the twofold character of moralist and psychologist.

We by no means intend to say that he preached in a haphazard fashion, that he trusted to the inspiration of the moment, and drew, as his subject suggested, on the rich storehouse of his mind, instead of preparing beforehand. There is no trace of this method, or want of it, in the sermons that exist in his own handwriting; nor would it in any way coincide with the instructions on preaching which he drew up for the young Archbishop of Bourges, André Freymot, St Jane Frances de Chantal's brother. These famous instructions, which the author called "*Advice on the true manner of Preaching*," form something more than a letter, something less than a treatise. Written *calamo currente*, the rules he formulates are the fruit of many years' meditation on the subject, and are those he carefully practised himself.

The author never loses sight of the supernatural purpose of the work of which he is treating, and recommends that the methods employed should be also chiefly supernatural. The preacher's office is to sow the Word of God in his hearers' hearts (*semen est verbum Dei*), and to do this he has first to make

his own spiritual preparation by prayer and the Sacraments, and by practising the sacerdotal virtues that will make him a living sermon.

He speaks next of the fables, strained allegories, ridiculous tales which only render the sacred ministry "*despicable, and cause it to be vituperated*," and of a generally prevailing bad taste, which he largely contributed to banish from the pulpit. Then, after pointing out to his young friend, who at that time was not very well equipped in theology, where to go for further information on the various heads suggested, he lays great stress on the necessity of method: "In everything, method is necessary; nothing is more helpful to the preacher; nothing makes his preaching more useful; nothing is more pleasing to the audience. In my opinion, the method ought to be plain and easy to grasp—not such as some adopt, who think it the sign of a master hand to conceal their method and let no one find it out; but what is the good of it, I ask you, if no one can follow it?"

He next gives some typical examples of the methods best adapted to various subjects, such, for instance, as the mysteries of the Faith and of our Lord's Life, the moral virtues, the panegyric of a Saint.

The two following examples are both on the Resurrection: (*a*) "Take the principal point; next consider what precedes and what follows it. The Resurrection is preceded by death, descent into hell and by the Jews' fear that the body will be stolen away. Then comes the Resurrection itself

in the blessed and glorious body. Then the earthquake, the apparition of angels, their words to the holy women. It is wonderful how many beautiful things there are to say on each one of these points if the proper order be kept."

(*b*) "After a brief summary of the story, three or four considerations may be drawn from it: (1) its teaching to the edification of our faith; (2) to the augmentation of our hope; (3) to rekindle our charity; (4) to animate us to imitation and action."

Here is a method for general use in sermons exhorting to the practice of some one virtue taught by a particular text of scripture: "Having discovered in the text what the virtue aims at, consider next what it consists in, what its marks are, what its effects, how it can be practised. I have always used this method myself."

These examples are chosen from among others, all equally simple. The writer's intention, it will be perceived, was not that all sermons should be shaped in the same mould, but that each should have unity in itself, a connected plan, an unbroken thread. But this unity, this plan, were to be determined by the nature of the subject, by the standpoint from which the preacher regarded it, and by the purpose which he had in view. The method, it may be noticed, differs little from the one Fénelon afterwards developed in his *Dialogues sur l'Eloquence*, and is in point of fact, nothing more than a happy application of the traditional method of the Fathers of both the Greek and Latin Churches, of Chrysostom and Augustine.

But interesting as it might be to study and compare these resemblances, let us attempt rather, as more to our purpose, to form some conception of our Saint's own manner; and in order to do this the best plan will be to study him in the early freshness and spontaneity of his opening career.

He composed his first sermon in his twenty-sixth year (that is before he received priest's orders), and preached it on the Feast of Pentecost 1593. Let us briefly analyse this sermon.

In the exordium, the preacher asks the indulgence of his audience towards himself on account of his youth, and reminds them that in their midst, his vocation grew. He then exposes the mystery of the Blessed Trinity; describing the Third Person as proceeding from the Father and the Son and as their mutual love.

He next explains what is meant by the Descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles, the Holy Spirit being always everywhere present in the mystery of the Trinity. Then he gives the hidden sense of the two signs accompanying the Descent: the sudden sound "as of a mighty wind" that filled "the whole house"; the "parted tongues as it were of fire" that "sat upon everyone of them." The sound representing the holy fear of God, producing in souls the trembling of salutary fear and preparing the way for love, as a thunder-storm in summer heralds fructifying showers; the fire representing the spiritual flame and light which, made fruitful by the Spirit of Truth, enlighten the world and renew the face of the earth; a

second creation in which the omnipotence of God is even more visible than in the first, because of obstacles to be overcome which the first had not to meet in the resistance of the human will, the liberty of which God always respects. Then commenting allegorically on Psalm xviii., he describes the effects of the Descent of the Holy Ghost—the apostles transformed into men of intrepid courage; the pride of idolatry broken like the cedars of Libanus, and laid low at the feet of Christ crucified and His humble Church; the world filled with light, the people blessed with the true peace. Then, by way of practical conclusion, he goes through, and describes the dispositions in which we ought to make our preparation for the effusion of grace; fidelity to divine precept, the fraternal charity, the humility towards one another which will keep us from blaming others for our sins, and will also make us correct our faults in our eagerness to be restored to peace with God. Prayer, through the infinite merits of the Saviour, and the intercession of the Saints whom heretics revile and reject because they will not understand that we honour all the Saints, and Mary the Queen of Saints, only as creatures; and that any honour rendered to them has, as its final intention, the glory of God alone.

The plan of this sermon is so evident that it is scarcely necessary to dissect it. First the story, and, in the measure possible, the explanation of the mystery, the fruits it ought to produce in our souls, the dispositions into which it is our duty to

put ourselves to receive these fruits. The scheme is well arranged, well connected, and leads, with admirable directness, from theological instruction to spiritual exhortation.

But before finally leaving this sermon, let us study its exterior form. And first of all let us be honest enough to begin with its archaisms. There are two of these. The first is an illustration borrowed from old Pliny, a story stupid enough to put anyone to sleep, about does and fauns. The second is one of those subtle interpretations and twistings of sense which were the fashion of the day. The number of the apostles who were assembled in the Cœnaculum on the Day of Pentecost, suggested a problem which, as such, the young preacher felt bound to solve; and this is how he did it, in what no doubt he thought an edifying and ingenious manner. A hundred and twenty being the product of 12 multiplied by 10, we, if we would receive the Holy Spirit, ought to multiply and enrich the twelve articles of the creed by the observation and execution of the ten commandments of the Law. To modern minds this kind of exaggeration of the symbolism of numbers, may perhaps seem more like Pythagorean than Christian doctrine.

Otherwise the sermon, exact as to its theology, is absolutely exquisite in its grace and freshness, in its delicate touches, its wonderful knowledge of the spiritual life and in its unction. We should like nothing better than to give it *in extenso*, even the exordium, but must content ourselves with a couple of paragraphs.

In the first we have St Francis at his best, for he is never more thoroughly himself than when, as here, describing nature and endeavouring to raise the soul through things seen to the divine unseen realities. His subject is the love of God. "Has it never happened to you in a dry, thirsty season to go out and see your garden with its mouth wide open and its throat, so to speak, gaping to receive rain; and while no help comes from the sky, the herbage grows pale and dries up, the flowers fade and wither? At such times, the country folk gather together and make prayers and processions to procure the softening of the sky and the rain they long for, for their fields. Then there comes a hot, impetuous wind which gathers up all the exhalations that have already risen, and weaves them into a great black cloud which seems to veil the whole sky, and in which thunder is begotten and lightning flashes, and which threatens, instead of bringing any relief to the fruits of the earth, to burst over them in thunderbolts and hail and tempest, and destroy what little the drought has left. Then the poor labourers, in greater anxiety than ever, with more sighs, more sorrowing affections, stretch out their blackened hands towards the sky, holding in them blessed candles, and they beseech the Creator to turn away His wrath, because of the poverty and wretchedness this cloud will bring on their poor families, if it does what it seems to threaten—and when, drop by drop, the cloud descends in nothing but clear water, and the thirsty land drinks as much as it likes, and that shower

is more like a heavy dew than stormy rain, when all this happens, the labourer has good cause to bless God; for he sees his garden and his fields grow greener than ever, his flowers lift up their heads again, the fruits recover, so to speak, the breath the heat had robbed of them, and offer to the poor men who sowed and planted them, the banquet they had hoped for, of abundant crops."

Sympathy with the hard lives of the poor is the master touch in these living pictures, while the parable is a very plain and instructive one.

In the next passage I shall quote, the comparison is borrowed, not from nature, but from a game popular at the time in Savoy. It is a good instance of our Saint's faculty for adapting himself to his audience, of what we may call his presence of mind, a marked characteristic of all his sermons which are never dreamy or abstract. Even at this early stage he had already acquired that wonderful *science of the soul* which is developed in every page of the *Introduction to the Devout Life*. The patriotism of the passage is, it will be remarked, of a practical order; he advises his countrymen, at a time when Savoy was threatened with invasion, to contribute to the safety of their country by the amendment of their lives.

"Our impenitence comes from our courtesy towards ourselves. We each of us flatter ourselves, and cast the blame of our misfortunes on some one else's sins; and, when I listen to the kind of talk that goes on in Savoy, I begin to think we must all

be playing at *change*. I hope I shall be pardoned for taking this game as an illustration of what I mean: I happen just to have seen it played. A number of virtuous young ladies meet, and when they have talked and chatted together some time they come to the end of their budget, and being unwilling to eke out the conversation at the expense of the absent, they set to work to play some harmless game, as for instance *change*. Each girl takes her colour, and has to keep it from change: so that supposing at the beginning of the game the first thing called out is 'the green changes,' she who has green has to say, 'it is not the green that changes, but the grey'; and the grey, 'it is not the grey that changes, but the blue'; and so on, the time passing in nothing but one throwing the *change* on the other, until it is time to go home and the party separates. Just so, my friends, it seems to me we spend our time in Savoy playing at *change*; for, if you talk to the people, it is the nobility who are to change, because they are too cowardly to remonstrate; if to the nobility, it is the officers of justice who ought to change, because they meddle with other people's business; if to the officers of justice, it is the soldiers who should change, because they are disorderly; if to the soldiers, it is the captains who must change, because they keep back the pay or are so avaricious that, to be able to steal themselves, they let the men do it. Speak to the captains, and it is the princes who ought to change, because they ought not to go to war without the money to do it with,

or at least ought to arrange in the best way they can; and some there are who say that all the harm is done by the priests, because their lives are not so good as they ought to be. These last are the wise ones, for in these times of danger it is not safe to speak against anyone but ecclesiastics, with whom everyone may find fault. The fact is we shall go on playing at this game too long if we do not know when it is time to break up, and, if we do not take care, we shall at last find ourselves in the same case as some other nations we have seen, running hither and thither for their lives. What then should we do? We must banish sin from amongst us, make our peace with God, and then we soon shall have peace on earth. And what sin must we banish? Ah, I am not going to play at change too, and say the sins of other people; but I pray you all to say what I say, each to speak to his own conscience, not to other people's: *O my soul, guilty of so many sins upon sins, of so many offences, of such want of courage, the wrath of God has justly fallen on this people, for art thou not the cause of all this evil?*"

This sermon, a first attempt it must not be forgotten, is quite enough to give some idea of what St Francis might have become as an orator had he, like Bourdaloue for instance, devoted himself to preaching. We have here all the more salient features of his later manner: the pious unction, the subtle individual charm, the sympathy, the insight into souls, the power of putting himself into touch with his audience, the faculty for not generalising, for not

speaking in the abstract like a book, but according to the particular needs, dispositions, social habits and conditions of his listeners; this faculty he called *alloqui hominem*, "speaking to his man," and this he did so skilfully that each individual was made to feel that he, personally, was being addressed; that a kind of dialogue was in fact being carried on between his soul and the preacher.

He preached for thirty years without any great alteration of manner. As an older man, and a bishop, his speech became rather slower and graver, more authoritative, more paternal; his action acquired a certain grace of greater dignity, but the old charm remained, while the added qualities appear to have made a great impression on his contemporaries. As a younger man, perhaps still a little overawed by the dignity of his own state, he had been too humble to be as vigorous, as energetic a preacher as he became afterwards; but, to the end, it was his gentleness, his intense sweetness, quite as much as his strength, that delighted all who heard him. This chapter would not, however, be complete without some example of this stronger side of his oratory.

Here are words in which M. de Boisy, allowing for the difference between earthly and heavenly warfare, would not have disowned his son. "Our Master chose *the death of the cross* to confirm us in constancy; by this choice showing us that we ought not to weary of suffering no matter how long or how much it is, since, whatever it may be, it can never be anything in comparison with

what He bore for us. We must make our courage greater, imitating that of our Captain, never surrendering, but combating valiantly to the death without ever being astonished at the multitude of our enemies." [1]

But this note of bravery, this loyalty in boldly declaring the path of Christian perfection, of every Christian life, to be one of self renunciation and sacrifice, is nowhere more marked than in his sermons at the clothings and professions of religious. "See," he said on one such occasion, "it is not our custom to deceive those who ask to be received into religion, for we tell them plainly that they die when they come here, and that they must altogether cease to live to any of those things to which they lived in the world. In the world you lived to your own will, here you must make your will die; there you were alive in all your senses, here they all must be dead. You will possess nothing here of your own; no one will sound your praises; you will be no more mentioned than if you were not in the world." [2]

He develops this idea in another passage, which we must give just as it stands.

"No, their souls are never deceived. They are promised that they shall enjoy eternal felicity, but on the condition of first renouncing the fleeting joys of earth. They are told they must leave their parents' house, their country in effect and affection, to have no home, no country, but those of our Lord. They are promised the consolations

[1] Good Friday, 1614.

[2] Sermon preached at a clothing, F. of St Claud, 6th June 1617.

that God is accustomed to vouchsafe to those who faithfully serve Him, consolations that are indeed very great even in this life; but on conditions of renouncing all sensual pleasures, however lawful. We say to them, if you have until now liked to live according to your own will, and have thought highly of your own judgment, henceforward you must do this no more, but, on the contrary, you must esteem nothing but obedience and submission. We put a veil on their heads in token that they shall be hidden from the eyes of the world; and if in the past they affected to be known and esteemed, henceforward they will never be so much as mentioned; the veil will prevent it being known if they are beautiful, graceful, pleasant, and from henceforth they must renounce whatever affection for all these things they may have. We tell them they are indeed called to share their Saviour's joy on Mount Thabor, but only after they have been crucified with Him on Mount Calvary by continued self mortification, and by accepting, without choice of any sort or kind, the mortifications imposed on them. And as for the end, we promise them that they shall be the brides of our glorified Lord, after they have been the brides of the Crucified; and we offer them a crown of gold, but first they must accept that of thorns."[1]

[1] Sermon preached at a clothing on the Eve of the Epiphany, 5th January 1618.

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CHAPTER VI

CORRESPONDENCE AND DIRECTION

A SAINT has this privilege over other great men, the closer we examine him the more we see to love and admire in him. And in this respect, his contemporaries are at an advantage; they can study him from the life, in his daily course and actions, at unaware moments, and they live in the light of the rays of Divine charity that stream from the soul, the dazzling vision of which God reserves to Himself. We, for our part, must content ourselves with the means at our disposal, history and correspondence; the latter, in the present case, being of very peculiar value.

The letters of St Francis form a very large collection.[1] They vary much in length and a good deal in matter; some are very short, but exquisitely turned, notes; some letters long enough to form short treatises; while, of the whole, nearly three quarters are letters of spiritual direction, or on some other religious subject, written to seculars and religious. His letters are *himself*. The very St Francis we have attempted in these pages to depict, is in them; tender-hearted, sympathising

[1] The collection before me contains nearly 900 pages, published by Mathon & Sarlit, Lyons and Paris, 1859.

with all the joys and sorrows of others; able, like St Paul, to say *Quis infirmatur et ego non infirmor*; there, with his wonderful delicacy in handling souls, taking them just as he finds them, in order to lead them to what they ought to be; there, loving all God's creatures for and in the spotless purity of the love of God; and so cheerful, bright, brave himself that he kindles others to bravery, while not hiding from them that he is inviting them to tread a path strewed with thorns, and leading to Calvary.

I

The gift of consolation was his pre-eminently, and for two reasons. He had suffered himself and he could lead others to the one only and Divine source of consolation. The so-called "consolations" of heathen philosophers are oratorical dissertations on the instability of mortal things; but it is not very easy to understand why the reflection that trouble is part of an inevitable fate, makes it easier to bear.

St Francis has another method. He becomes *one* with those he wants to comfort, makes their sorrows his own; and to apply to him the sneer "it is very easy to *talk*," would have been impossible. His consolations were not mere talk; he knew by experience, the void, the bitterness that death creates. When his mother died, and shortly afterwards his brother,[1] he had, as he ex-

[1] On the subject of his brother, the young Baron de Thorens' death, he wrote two letters to religious of the Visitation, two

pressed it, "to hold his bruised heart in both hands" to offer it as a sacrifice to His God dying on the cross. When he exhorted others not to mourn, "even as others who have no hope," they knew his heart went with his words.

Of these letters of condolence I shall quote one only, written to Mme la Présidente Brulart on the occasion of her son's death while serving his King in the Indies.

"My soul sorrows with your heart, very dear mother! for it seems to me I see that poor mother-heart all covered with a distress that none, who consider how lovable your son was, can blame or wonder at.

"Very dear mother, it is true that your dear son was everything that is to be desired; all who knew him say so. But is not this one great reason why we should be comforted? For indeed it seems to me that those whose lives have so deserved remembrance and esteem, live after they are dead, because of the delight we take in recalling them, in bringing them back to the minds of those who remain.

"Your son, very dear mother, had gone very far away from us, preferring to deprive himself of the air of the world in which he was born, in order to serve his God, his King, his country in another and new world. This, the generosity of his spirit made him do; and yours made you consent to his ful-

to relations of his own, all of which ought to be read to understand how he felt grief. His brother, he says, he loved "beyond belief." Only a few months after the Baron de Thorens died, his widow, Mme de Chantal's daughter, died too at the age of nineteen.

filling an intention that did him honour. You did this at the cost of giving up all hope of ever seeing him again in this life, hoping only that from time to time you might receive letters from him. And now, very dear mother, by the good pleasure of Divine Providence, he has left that world to which you consented to his going, to go to one, the oldest, the most to be desired of all worlds, to which all of us, each in our time, must go, where you will be with him again sooner than you would had he stayed in the new world, making conquests for his King and the Church.

"And to sum up the whole matter, he was doing his duty, fulfilling the obligations of his state, when he died. This is an excellent way to die, and you must not doubt that God has made him happy, for from the cradle He followed him with His grace, and helped him to lead a Christian life. Console yourself, therefore, very dear mother, and take comfort while you adore that Divine Providence which ordereth all things sweetly, although the motives of His decrees are hidden from us.

"You will soon follow your beloved child, and when you are there you will not wish that he was in the Indies, for you will see that he is a great deal better off among angels and saints, than he would among savages and tigers.

"And now you can no longer write to him, speak for him to God instead, and do not doubt that by this method your son will promptly know all you would say to him. And all the assistance you would give him by your prayers and offerings,

place in the hands of the Divine Majesty, and instantly it will benefit him.

"You cannot imagine how much I have felt this blow, for after all he was to me as a dear brother, and he also loved me. I have prayed and always shall continue to pray for him; and for you also, very dear mother, whom, all my life, I shall hold in special honour and affection for the sake of him who is gone."

II

We already know St Francis in the character of a peace-maker, and the area of personal intervention being too circumscribed to satisfy him, he often used his pen for purposes of reconciliation.

One such letter is to an inexorable father with whom he pleads for a penitent son, urging every motive that should induce him to pardon him. He even pleads as if he were himself the offender, humbling himself as his representative, and protesting that henceforward he means to live in "humble obedience" to the outraged father. Then he appeals to old friendship: "Give me, Monsieur, I beseech you, the pleasure of knowing that your son has received this great happiness through my intervention; that he may know that I hold as high a place in your goodwill as you do in my respect and honour." Next he appeals as a priest and guide of conscience: "One word more, Monsieur, you will permit me to add as belonging to my office. Fathers are indeed obliged to use severity towards their children, but they should, at the same

time, have a good will towards them, that the severity which punishes may not degenerate into the obdurate hardness that overwhelms."[1]

Another of these letters is addressed to two sisters, who, living in the same neighbourhood, kept up a constant bickering. He writes to them in the tone of a father to equally beloved daughters: "Of course one letter is enough between two sisters who have but one heart and one mind. How salutary it is to hold to each other as you do." There was more of course in those words than the surface meaning; but open advice was reserved for the last paragraph of the letter: "Whom God has joined in the same blood, the same sentiments, cannot be sundered while the same God dwells in us all. Ah! then, dear daughters, live in this manner, and what better thing can I wish you? Be like spiritual *bees*—bring honey and wax to your hives, and nothing else. Let your homes be the abode of gentleness, peace, concord, humility, piety, and all this through your conversation."[2]

Next come two great ladies, a mother and daughter, M^me^ Leloup de Montfant and M^me^ la Comtesse de Dalet. M^ons^ and M^me^ de Montfant were constantly in money difficulties, whilst their daughter, a widow, was rich, and even at this time was thinking of entering the Visitation, which she afterwards did. Both ladies were fervent Christians, but there was an utter incompatibility between their tempers—the mother imperious, the daughter independent—and they were constantly coming to loggerheads on money

[1] Letter clxvii., 8th January 1610.
[2] Letter Dcccl xvi. No date.

questions. There was every sort of reason why they should be united, but, from nothing but want of knowing how to subdue their tempers, the very things that ought to have drawn them together became a constant source of dissension. The Bishop of Geneva, the confidant of both, was often a good deal perplexed as to which was in the right and which in the wrong, and for this reason his advice, while not varying in spirit, betrays alterations of opinion. To begin with, it evidently puzzles him exceedingly why such good people quarrel at all. "I confess," he writes to a common friend, "that I cannot understand why it is that a mother so clever, so pious, so perfect in so many ways, and a daughter so devout, and of such really great virtue, are not altogether united in the great God who is the God of union; but I know it is so."[1]

The first thing he insists upon is that filial duty, a doubly sacred duty when it comes to succouring parents, should be generously put into practice. M^me^ Leloup de Montfant complains, he says, "that her daughter insists upon having a separate purse, although she sees her mother in great difficulty and trouble, and that she does nothing to relieve her. This is quite contrary to my sentiments. It seems to me that a daughter who has means ought not to spare them in helping a mother."[2]

His letter to the daughter took the same line, and was even a little stronger; but his final judgment was reserved until he could be quite sure he knew all the

[1] Letter cccclxxviii. To Mother de Chastel, 25th April 1621.
[2] Letter cccclxxviii. To Mother de Chastel, 25th April 1621.

circumstances of the case. The true state of things the Bishop did not learn until some months later. Money was squandered in a reckless manner that did no one any good, in the de Montfant establishment; and M^me^ de Dalet could have met all the demands made on her only by sacrificing her own little children's interests. This, of course, put the whole matter into a different light; but, even under these circumstances, the Bishop's letter to M^me^ de Dalet is on the old lines. He teaches wisely, delicately, how maternal and filial duty may be reconciled without retracting one word of his former advice about living at peace and giving in to a mother's demands and even caprices. "Oh, my dear lady," he writes, "a great many things ought to be done for fathers and mothers! And how lovingly should we bear the excess, the zeal, the ardour, I had almost said the *importunity* of their affection."[1] But still he sees the matter in a practical aspect. As living together does not conduce to harmony in this particular case, separation is discreetly suggested. "I do not see," he says, "what objection there could be to your living apart; there is nothing like a little separation for preserving union of heart between people who are of different, but both good, dispositions, and whose ideas are not the same."[2] There is perhaps just a little grain of malice in this advice, a little hit at women's weaknesses; but how gentle, how indulgent, and how sensible it all is.

[1] Letter cccclxxix. To the Comtesse de Dalet, 15th April 1621.

[2] Letter cccclxxxii. To the Comtesse de Dalet, 1621.

III

But consolation, peace-making, are scarcely more than beautiful episodes evoked by circumstances in the correspondence; its bulk, its value, its direction. Direction, of which we spoke in a former chapter as so important a factor in the spiritual life, meant, when St Francis was the director, the clearest insight, perfectly sure doctrine, and force tempered by the tenderness of a mother for her child. On this last point let us dwell a little. St Francis one day told his daughters of the Visitation that, to love our neighbour as ourselves is the law for all; but that to love him better is the law of evangelical perfection. "Our Lord Himself told us this: '*Love one another as I have loved you.*' He said, that is, more than yourselves. And, just as our Lord always preferred us to Himself, so is it His will that we should so love one another that we always prefer our neighbour to ourselves."[1]

Now this law St Francis himself put into practice as a director. He had immense power over souls and could do almost anything he liked with them; but it was the power of gentleness, of kindness, of a love that was never withdrawn, a love that broke often into tender, spontaneous expression. "I do not think," he wrote to M^me^ de Chantal, "that there is in all the world a soul more cordially, tenderly, and to speak quite openly, more lovingly fond than I am; and I think I even superabound

[1] *Entretiens spirituels*, No. iv., "on cordiality." Ed. d'Annecy, vol. vi., p. 57.

in love and in expressions of love, especially at first. . . . But, all the same, I delight in those vigorous, independent souls that have no trace of effeminacy in them; for this very great tenderness troubles the soul a little and makes it over anxious. It is strange how I manage to fit such contrary things into one another." [1]

But this extreme tenderness, deep, yet on the surface, which was so divinely helpful to souls in their holy ambition to advance in the path of perfection, was as pure as the clear transparent waters of his own Lake of Annecy. It was an absolutely spiritual tenderness, the love of souls, a tenderness that nothing but the adjective *angelic* can give any idea of.

Direction and devotion he considers as correlative terms. Devotion he thinks of as something over and above mere fidelity to the precepts of the law. "It is," he says, "a general inclination and promptitude to do whatever we know to be pleasing to God. Those who are simply *good* people (he means, of course, good Christians) walk in the law of God; but the devout run, and the very devout fly." [2]

Now these last, especially, want direction; for conscience, while generally sufficing to distinguish between right and wrong, between the lawful and the unlawful, does not show us so clearly how to keep, and advance in the perfection of our state. Now it is just this yearning for perfection in the souls under his direction that makes our Saint's

[1] Letters, old ed., vol. vi., No. xxiii.
[2] Letter to M^me^ Brulart, 3rd October 1601.

spiritual letters so beautiful as they are. We stand in some purer air, or in the midst of a chosen company, the "picked corps," if the expression may be pardoned, of the vast Christian army.

In this corps two figures stand out almost from the beginning of the correspondence, two sisters who require a few words of special notice. In 1604, while preaching the Lent Station at Dijon, St Francis made the acquaintance of all the better class of people in the town, and of President Bourgeois de Crépy among others, a very good old man. Monsieur de Crépy had two daughters, one of whom (apparently the elder) married Monsieur (afterwards *President*) Brulart; the other sister became Abbess of the Puits d'Orbe. Both sisters put themselves, so far as distance permitted, under the direction of their father's saintly friend, and ten of his letters to M^me^ Brulart and fifteen to the Abbess have been preserved, all of them treasures of spirituality.

Almost the first thing about these letters that strikes us is the similarity between those to the nun and those to her sister living in the world; a similarity, that is, of spirit, aim, and in a broad, general way, even of methods.

His first letter — a very long one — to M^me^ Brulart, begins with the definition of devotion already quoted, then points out the chief, or to speak more correctly, the only obstacle that has to be overcome. This obstacle is attachment to one's own will; and once this truth is grasped, the whole aim and purpose of the spiritual life will be

understood as consisting in the task of doing away with self and self-will; and this is to be accomplished, not by one blow, but by a ceaseless warfare. "Just in the degree in which our self-will diminishes, will the Will of God be easily observed. Our Lord wishes each to bear his Cross by the renunciation of self, that is of self-will. I should like this or that; I should rather be here or there; these are temptations. Our Lord knows very well what He is doing; let us do what He wants us to do, stay where He has put us." Now, it is just on this condition that devotion acquires the crowning feature on which St Francis set so great a price and becomes a joyous devotion: "If I were not a bishop, knowing what I know now, I should not wish to be one. But being one, I am under obligation not only to do everything required by my heavy charge, but to do it joyfully, and I ought to take pleasure in all I do and like it."[1]

In another letter he tells her not to be unhappy or discouraged by her own faults and imperfections in conduct or feelings. "No, don't be distressed, don't be astonished, for though these faults must certainly be rejected, detested in order to get rid of them, you must not be afflicted with a distressed affliction, but with the quiet courageous affliction which begets good solid purposes of amendment."[2]

He says very much the same things to the abbess on the nature of devotion, on the peace of soul that nothing but self-love and self-esteem trouble.

[1] Letter dccxxxv., October 1604.

[2] Letter dccxxxix., January 1608.

"What does it mean that if we fall into some imperfection or sin we are surprised, troubled, impatient? What else than that we thought we were something better, more resolute, steadier; and, for that reason, when we find we are not what we thought, and that we have fallen flat on our noses, we do not like it, and are uneasy, disturbed. Whereas, did we but know what we are, instead of being aghast at finding we have tumbled down, we should wonder at it if we could stand."

And with regard to the never ending war that has to be waged against self-love, and all the passions that have their principle in self-love, he says, "And when our Lord separates us from our little pet passions, it is as if our hearts were being flayed alive; it is the last skin of our old man being torn off." He speaks also of the peace that must never be let go, amidst all this warfare and "*perturbation* of spirit";[1] and last of all of the *joyous expansion* which is the finishing touch of true devotion: "Yes, my daughter, I write to you what I said to you; be as joyous as you can in your good works; for good works that are well done and joyfully done have double grace."[2]

This valiant high-spirited tone is the key-note of all his direction, no matter how it diverges into different forms adapted to different states of life, all of which may be made to tend to perfection.

He tells M^me^ Brulart, and she may be taken as representing all married persons living in the world, to love the state of life in which God has placed her,

[1] Letter li., April 1604. [2] Letter lxxxix., May 1606.

and where it is His Will she should be above every other state. He divines, or rather knows by experience, that the more souls grow in favour, the more liable are they to a pious envy of the higher state of those who have chosen the better part—this he calls a *temptation* and deals with as such, and only such. "I should like you to consider how many saints of both sexes have lived in the vocation and state you live in, and how gently they adapted themselves to it, and let this consideration give you the same mind. You must love what God loves, and God loves your vocation; you too, therefore, must love it very much, and don't let us amuse ourselves by thinking of other people's vocations. Do diligently all that yours demands, placing yourself at our Lord's feet in spirit, and saying to Him: 'My Lord, whether I run or whether I stand, still I am all yours and you are mine; you are my spouse first of all, and all that I do, I do for you.'" All his advice, no matter whether it be in regard to spiritual exercises or to the ordering of a household, centres on one point. The *life* must be a sermon; the apostolate of *example* is his constant theme. "Do honour to your devotion," he says, "make it amiable to everyone who knows you; let all have cause to speak well of it."[1] Such were the lessons he taught M^me^ Brulart, when her life was, indeed, declining, but still prosperous. We know how he helped her when it came to teaching her the lesson of Calvary.

With her sister, the Abbess, he was perpetually

[1] Letter dccxxxv.

insisting on the lessons of *suffering* and *doing*, and both in conformity with the Divine Will. *Suffering*, for she had much bodily pain to bear from a wound that nothing, not even a very painful operation, cured. *Doing*, for she was engaged in the difficult task of reforming her monastery, into which relaxed habits, very contrary to the rule (that of St Benedict) had crept.

Nothing could be tenderer, stronger, more virile than his instructions in the "art of suffering well"; nothing wiser than the plan he recommends for the restoration to primitive fervour of her Community; the first thing to be done is to set to work to realise in herself for her own sake and God's the type of religious perfection which she wishes to see restored in all her daughters; she is to sanctify herself to sanctify others. She is not to attempt everything all at once, not try to carry things with a high hand. Not "alarm" by giving out all her plans of reformation at the same moment, for that would inevitably have the effect of making "touchy" Sisters obstinate—she must set to work gradually. She must set such a good example of regularity that it becomes infectious to others, and makes them, without other prompting, feel they ought to try to do the work of their own reformation. She must exert her authority often, but "in small matters, very little, easy, not disagreeable things, and always be quick to give praise humbly." When she gives an order it must be couched in the form of a wish: "My dear Sister, if I *ask* you to do so and so, you will do it for the Love of God, wont

you?" He called this kind of thing his "artifices,"[1] but there is more of the dove in them than the serpent, and they remind one that he once said he would "give twenty serpents for one dove." But the simple artifices suggested were, it is pleasant to record, so successful that perfect order and great fervour were gradually restored in the monastery. Seven years later, however, the same Abbess, too zealous to rest while anything remained undone, wrote to consult him about some still existing difficulties. He took things more calmly than she did, but thought of them much in the same way; both might, in fact, have taken for their motto, the words *Semper excelsior*—and this was his half playful but wholly serious answer: "My dear daughter, you must be as courageous as you used to be, and *die* rather than let go the grip of your teeth!" Then he goes on to comfort her by reminding her of past experiences: "Well! my dear daughter, and so you have been thinking of leaving because all these difficulties frighten you? Yet you have seen what has been done in the past—and so will it be now; there is nothing perseverance will not overcome."[2]

There is no little pain, after these instances showing the good done by our Saint's influence, both in family and Community life, to have to record an instance of an opposite nature; but had he lived a little longer, even this career which began with the fairest promise might have closed very differently.

[1] Letter lxii., October 1604. [2] Letter cxciv., April 1611.

Angélique Arnaud, the daughter of the famous lawyer, and sister of the Arnaud whom Boileau has called "the great Jansenist doctor," had, in a very irregular manner, been made coadjutrix of the Abbess of Port Royal when only seven years and some months old. Three years later she became Abbess, her father having represented her as being seven years older in order to obtain the Canonical Bulls required before she could take possession of the monastery. Both as a child and older girl, Angélique's life was as much that of a heathen as she could, with any semblance of propriety,[1] make it, and at fifteen, as she herself tells us, she was "considering how she could leave Port Royal and go back to the world without consulting her parents, in order to find a husband somewhere, being altogether disgusted with her religious profession." A serious illness hindered the fulfilment of these plans, and soon afterwards her father, no less tricky in his dealings with his child than with Rome, got her to sign a paper which at the time she little knew contained a renewal of her religious vows; her father had perhaps had his suspicions. A period of indecision and hopelessness followed, which lasted Lent, when a sermon on the self-annihilation of the Incarnate Word in His nativity and infancy touched her heart so deeply, that from that hour, she tells us, she was "more happy in being a religious than she had ever been unhappy for the same reason."

She now threw herself with all the impetuous ardour of her nature into the practice of excessive

[1] *Sainte Beuve, Port Royal*, vol. i., p. 92.

austerities and wished to abandon the dignity of abbess. This being refused by those in authority over her, she set to work, with an energy that nothing withstood, to reform, first her own monastery, then that of Maubuisson, where great relaxation prevailed.

It was just at this time that she expressed her desire to see the Bishop of Geneva, then in Paris, and as it proved, for the last time. Unable, as usual, to refuse such a request, he went to Maubuisson, preached and held a confirmation. "If I had had before a great desire to see him," she writes, "when I saw him I had a still greater one to open my conscience to him, for God was in him visibly and in truth."[1] On his side the Bishop felt a remarkable attraction towards a soul so generous, so eager; haughty there could be no doubt, attached to her own way, still very far from the spiritual self-renunciation, the interior peace, which are essential conditions of growth in holiness; proud even in her humility, but greedy of sacrifice; capable of every lofty virtue, if only her very remarkable faculties could be brought under discipline and made supple. He put her into friendly relations with M^me^ de Chantal, in many respects a kindred soul, but in whom every thought and aim was balanced and disciplined. He stayed several days at Maubuisson, and had conversations with the Abbess, whom afterwards he directed by letter. Ten of these letters are to be found in the collection, and one has but to read them to know the character of the person

[1] *Sainte Beuve, Port Royal*, vol. i., p. 216.

to whom they are addressed, by the kind of things in which she had sought advice. In the third is one of those little touches that make our Saint's letters so living: "And so let there be no more *Monsieur* in me, so far as you are concerned; no *Madame* in you so far as I am. The old cordial, charitable titles of father and daughter are much more Christian, sweeter, and far more expressive of the sacred dilection which our Lord likes to find in us."[1]

In the very forefront of his recommendations to her, as the one urgent necessity he puts peace; peace that has its foundation in humility, in simplicity, in utter trustfulness in the guiding Hand of God. "I would say to my dear daughter," he writes, "that the road she has to walk in is nothing extraordinary; for it is only a very humble, peaceful, valiant sweetness. She is not to let herself think whether souls are grand or not grand, but to rest in God, and walk before Him in simplicity and humility. Let her not think where it is she is going, but only with *Whom* she goes, with her Spouse, her King, her Crucified God. To humble oneself, to abase oneself, despise oneself, even to the death of all our passions, to the very death of the Cross itself, I say, is to go with the Crucified Spouse. But this is all to be done very gently, very peaceably, constantly; and not only sweetly, but with joy and gladness."[2]

In this spirit she was to write to him, not making her letters studied literary efforts: "Don't take

[1] Letter ccccx., September 1619.
[2] Letter cccxci., June 1619.

pains to build up the letters you send me, for I don't want beautiful building nor tongue of angels, but the nest of doves, the language of dilection."[1]

But at the same time it was anything but his desire to stifle her rare intelligence or reduce her noble ambitions to the level of the vulgar commonplace. "Remember," he says to her, "that I have told you God has cast His eyes on you to make use of you in important matters, to draw you into a more excellent way of life." But he does want her to rid herself of self-torturing introspection, of mental worries, of everything that hinders her from walking forwards with a "fine free step," trustful as a child who dreads nothing and has no cares about the future. "Let us serve God well to-day; He will arrange about to-morrow. Don't have a care for to-morrow, for God who reigns to-day will also reign to-morrow."[2]

So much for her interior life, and the methods she must practice in order to advance to "the pure, the courageous, but very sweet and humble love of God,"[3] and things being right within, the outside will of necessity be right too. "Little by little *tame* the vivacity of your spirit and make yourself patient, sweet, affable towards all the pettiness, the childishness, the feminine imperfections of the Sisters who are so tender over themselves, and who like to come buzzing into their Mother's ears. Be careful how you use the word *stupidity*, and try always to practice *good humour*."[4]

[1] Letter cccx.
[2] Letter ccccxiii., Sept. 1619.
[3] Letter ccccxiii., Sept. 1619.
[4] Letter ccccxv., Sept. 1619.

But all this is easier, he knows, to say than to do. "Yes, it is quite true that you always have in your heart the unvarying resolve to belong all to God, but there is also this great natural activity which makes you conscious of such vicissitudes of impulse." But he is careful not to show any surprise at these *vicissitudes*, for he knows that "it is against her will that she harbours these stubborn, vain, almost rebellious tendencies." . . . "Should not I be disloyal, arrogant, if I thought otherwise than tenderly of the dear daughter who makes such strong efforts to confirm herself in gentleness, humility and simplicity?"[1]

It does not surprise us to find that the young Abbess, who had such knowledge of her own character, should have thought of entering the Visitation, where the very atmosphere was impregnated with the spirit of the Saint whose counsels she felt were so beneficial to her in her spiritual life. M^me^ de Chantal, to whom she wrote of this, cordially entered into the idea. But St Francis, without actually refusing to entertain it, held back, and consented only that the matter should be referred to Rome for proper authorisation. This, of course, was the only prudent course in the case of a person of such consequence as the Mother Angélique, who, belonging already to another order, wanted to enter the humble little congregation he had founded. But pending the decision, St Francis died; and, not very long afterwards, Mother Angélique unfortunately fell under the influence of the Abbé

[1] Letter ccccxxii., Oct. 1619, and Letter cccclliii., May 1620.

de St Cyran, who led her into those devious paths in connection with which her name is best known. Let us close this chapter with an extract from Mgr. Bougaud's "Life of St Chantal," in which he describes the demolition of this noble character: "Prouder, even more extreme than she was, and, in spite of all that has been said to the contrary, utterly without any of the qualities that contribute to the character of a good director, 'the Abbé de St Cyran,' instead of tranquillising her like St Francis, egged her on, added fuel to the fire of her excessive ardour, confused her with discussions on grace, and plunged her into heresy; and Mother Angélique carried with her into a peculiarly narrow, gloomy form of heresy utterly alien to her nature, all her vehemence, her exaggeration, as well as her feminine obstinacy; and while still retaining, even among the ruins of her grand character, some sparks of a former moral beauty, some greatness, she ended by becoming the very type of those virgins whom the Archbishop of Paris called *pure as angels but proud as devils.*"

CHAPTER VII

DIRECTION (*continued*)—ST JANE FRANCES DE CHANTAL. —FOUNDATION OF THE VISITATION

I

ST JANE FRANCES DE CHANTAL, who holds so pre-eminent a place in our Saint's correspondence, is no less prominent a figure in his work as a director, and the Visitation, which was the joint work of both Saints, was the outcome of their mutual relations as director and directed. For these reasons, while conscious that Mgr. Bougaud, in his admirable Life of M^me^ Chantal, has spoken the last word in the history of the Visitation, we feel it impossible to close this little work without devoting a chapter to it and to the connection between the two founders.

The story of M^me^ de Chantal's happy married life does not belong to these pages. Let it be enough to say that her husband, Baron de Chantal, was killed by a hunting accident, and that she had been five years a widow when she first saw the Bishop of Geneva. Her married life had been a very happy one, and her grief at her husband's sudden death was correspondingly intense. But she was a devoted Christian, a devoted mother and daughter; she had also a tormenting father-in-law who could never bear her to be out of his

sight, and to whose every need she attended with unfailing patience.

St Francis, it will be remembered, preached the Lent of 1604 at Dijon, and it was in attending these sermons that M^me^ de Chantal saw him for the first time. But here I must warn the reader who refuses to believe in the supernatural—I mean in the direct and miraculous interposition of God in human affairs—that, in a biography where well authenticated facts attest to such interposition, the supernatural necessarily has its place.

In 1603 the Bishop of Geneva was asked by the Mayor and Corporation of Dijon to preach the Lent of the following year in that town. This invitation he accepted "*eagerly*," resolved, as he said in his reply, "to overcome every difficulty and hindrance rather than fail to arrive on the day indicated." The plan, as it happened, met with the opposition of all his friends, and of one in particular, to whose opinion he generally deferred. But, as he tells us, he felt "so drawn by God to this blessed journey, that nothing could stay him." For this strong attraction he could not have accounted himself; he only knew that he had a certain good, and somewhat momentous, secondary purpose in visiting Dijon. It was there that the Archbishop of Bourges, a young man only lately elected to the See, lived, and the Church of Geneva being in litigation with that of Bourges, Francis hoped, in a personal interview with the Archbishop, to find some amicable way out of law proceedings; he never liked them in any kind of case,

and in ecclesiastical disputes positively detested them.

This Archbishop was none other than M^me^ de Chantal's brother — Bénigne de Fremyot; their father, the President of the Dijon Parliament, was a magistrate, and remarkable for his Christian and patriotic life, even in an age when the type he represents was happily far from uncommon in the higher ranks of the legal profession.

Monsieur de Fremyot perhaps felt for his daughter in her difficult position towards her father-in-law, in whose house, the Château de Monthelon, she lived; and may on that account have invited her to spend the Lent of 1604 at Dijon. There were not many forms of relief she could be induced to accept, and this year there was the special attraction of the Bishop of Geneva's sermons to offer, a preacher whose fame was wide-spread, and who was already reputed to be a Saint.

Madame de Chantal's place during the first sermon was exactly in front of the Bishop, who had never heard of or seen her before, but who *recognised* her.

But this recognition of an unknown person requires explanation. Before the Bishop came to Dijon he stayed some time at the Château de Sales, preparing his sermons, and it was there that one day, while he was alone in the Chapel, it was revealed to him that he would found a religious Order; and he distinctly saw, in a vision, all the chief subjects who would first join it. Among them was one lady in particular, tall, grave, and dressed like a widow; it was this lady whom he now recognised in the unknown

widow who seemed so extraordinarily interested in his sermon.

This and the corresponding incident, which we are about to relate, are recorded by all his biographers. One day, some time before, M^me^ de Chantal, while walking on the high road, saw standing before her one dressed like a bishop; she had never seen the person before, and described him only as of *angelic countenance, and breathing the air of Heaven itself*. At the same time she heard a voice speak these words: "This is the Guide, beloved of God and man, into whose keeping you are to confide your conscience."[1]

M^me^ de Chantal, at this time, was no novice in the spiritual life—she had taken a vow of perpetual chastity almost directly her husband died; she belonged to the third order of St Francis, and every moment of her life was so mapped out, that all the time not given up to her children's education, or to attendance on her father-in-law, might be devoted to prayer and visiting the poor and sick; while her daily life at Monthelon was, in itself, a purgatory borne with heroic courage.

Unfortunately for both her peace of mind and her spiritual progress, she had been mistaken in her choice of a director. Acting under the advice of some pious lady friends, she put herself under the

[1] Both visions, that vouchsafed to St Francis and that of M^me^ de Chantal, were, at the time of their respective canonisations, subjected to the most severe and careful examination. A number of witnesses were examined who had heard the story from the Saints themselves, and their evidence was so unanimous as to leave no doubt of their veracity.—Bougaud: "Life of St J. F. de Chantal," vol. i, p. 106.

direction of a religious who appears to have been a man of narrow and imperious temper. He had responded to her generous longing for self-immolation, by laying on her, not only a heavy burden of extravagant austerities, but a complicated system of prayer and meditation, while there was nothing in his direction to lead her into the liberty that is the "glory of the children of God," nothing to give her the peace of soul that has its spring in love. Her spiritual life was, in fact, one of continual distress. To add to her difficulties, the religious had bound her by a vow (of its very essence invalid) that she would remain under his direction *in perpetuum*, and never lay bare the secrets of her inner life to any other ear. It would be impossible to describe her sufferings under this yoke, and when she, in her turn, *recognised* the Bishop, her sufferings were but increased. She saw and talked to him several times at her father's house, and at last felt quite sure he was the very Guide in whom she had been told by the Voice to put her whole trust. But, on the other hand, there was her vow, which she ought never to have been asked to take, and in consequence of which she now suffered from torturing scruples. St Francis did not relieve her of these scruples all at once; he was too prudent to do so until he felt the time was ripe. But, when at last he did so, he went further, and accepted the full responsibility of directing her conscience.

In the absence of personal interviews, he soon began to write her those beautiful letters which hold

so pre-eminent a place in his correspondence, letters which are revelations of his most intimate self, his heart, mind and doctrine.

The earlier letters are more those of a friend giving advice than of a director; but even in these he lays the fundamental principles on which he afterwards built. "The farther from you I am as to the exterior," he writes, "the more do I feel bound and joined to you as to the interior; and I shall never cease to pray to our good God that it may please Him to perfect His holy work in you; that is, your good desire and design of attaining to the perfection of the Christian life. . . . And in all things and places I desire that you may have a holy liberty of mind touching the means of perfecting yourself—if the pillars be but firm and durable, it matters little how they are made so. . . . Keep yourself from scruples, from over eagerness, from anxiety; nothing hinders us more from walking in the path of perfection. Keep yourself always in the Presence of God. Throw your heart gently into our Lord's wounds; don't do it with all the strength of your arms. Have the utmost confidence in His mercy and goodness and that He never will forsake you; but, for all that, do not relax your hold on His Holy Cross." [1]

The following letter explains in precise and delicate terms the nature of the bond in which henceforth he is to be united to her. "I should find it very difficult to explain to you, either the quality or the magnitude of the affection I place at your spiritual

[1] Letter, 3rd May 1604.

service. But this much I can say: that I think it is of God, and for that reason I shall nourish and cherish it; and day by day, I perceive that it grows and augments notably. Behold me altogether yours. God has given me to you. The bond of charity, of true Christian friendship which exists between us, is what St Paul calls the *bond of perfection.* And indeed it is that, for it is indissoluble; the longer it endures, the stronger it becomes; death itself has no power over it. This is our bond, our chains, which, the tighter they press, the more ease and liberty will they give us; for beyond the nature of other things are they pliant yet strong." [1]

He kept all these pledges—and his spiritual daughter had henceforth only to walk on in confidence towards a new phase in her existence, while every day her soul became dearer to him.

The last vestiges of her hesitation vanished when next they had an opportunity of meeting. This was at St Claude, where some very long and serious conversations took place, after which the Bishop solemnly and officially accepted the care of her soul, "*as something he should have to answer for before God.*"

Her last scruple was the fear that in burdening him with the care of her "miserable soul" she would be taking him from more important duties. But he reassured her in a few words, and, directly after his return to Annecy, she received a further pledge of the change in their relations, in the shap of a rule of life drawn up on purpose for her. If anyone

[1] Letter, 23rd June 1604.

imagines that because the direction of St Francis was loving and amiable, it was soft or *coddling*, he cannot do better than read these rules to be undeceived. The document is interesting also, as showing the kind of life a Christian lady of the seventeenth century might be expected to lead.[1]

There are four chapters under these following headings: *Prayer and pious exercises; Corporal mortifications and penance; Care of the poor and sick; Duties as a mother and as a daughter.* The rules are quickened by their spirit, that spirit of sweetness and love "in which," says the compiler, "everything ought to be done." The *letter* would otherwise be *dead*; or, in the case of some particular rules, might even be a source of anxiety and scruple. But inflexibility or any narrowness of interpretation would be in direct opposition to the intention in which the rules were framed. "If it should happen to you to leave undone something I have prescribed," he writes, "have no scruple about it. For here, written in great big letters, is the rule of our obedience:

"EVERYTHING MUST BE DONE BY LOVE, NOTHING BY FORCE.

"OBEDIENCE MUST RATHER BE LOVED THAN DISOBEDIENCE FEARED.

I leave you the spirit of liberty; not that of the world which drives away obedience; for that is the liberty of the flesh; but the liberty which drives constraint, scruple, and over-eagerness away. Should

[1] Letter, 14th October 1604.

you have some just and charitable occasion for omitting your exercises, I wish that to be a kind of obedience; and let what is wanting be supplied by love." He goes into detail, and tells her that should she be interrupted in her meditation she must come away from it with "a bright face and a gracious heart towards the person who has interrupted her, because it is all the same serving of God whether she meditate or bear with her neighbour." This was a kind of thing that M^me^ de Chantal had never had said to her before, and it was these broad generous lines that made the new system such an admirable antidote to the narrowness of the old one with its contracting effect on the soul.

It soon bore fruit. Her virtues took deeper hold in her soul, she became more self-detached; and her natural character, strong, generous, but not exactly gentle, became less impetuous, less hasty. The change did not escape remark, and was attributed to the right cause. The old generous ardour was, however, by no means quenched; she still not only welcomed, but ran gladly out to meet the sacrifices which cost her nature dearest.

She had refused hitherto to see Monsieur d'Anlezy, a relation of her husband, who had been the innocent cause of his death. She had forgiven him as a Christian duty; but this was not enough for St Francis. Little by little, tactfully but perseveringly, he led her on to a higher form of forgiveness. It took, however, two whole years to overcome her repugnance, and then St Francis wrote to her, 6th July 1606:

"It is not necessary that you should fix any particular day or occasion. But if he comes, I want you, with all your heart, to be gentle, gracious, pitiful. I know your heart will not keep quiet, and will rise against it, and the blood will boil in your veins. But what does that matter?" Then follow words that indicate the heights of perfection he hoped at last to lead her to. "I mean that I want you to show that you love everything; yes, your husband's very death, your own death, in the death and in the love of your most sweet Saviour."

This was, however, very far from meaning that she was to forget her husband, or become unnaturally indifferent to his memory. "Anything but that," as he would have said. What it did mean was the supernatural transformation of terrestrial love. "You ask me," he writes, "if you do not speak of your husband too often. And what am I to answer? for I don't remember your doing so, my dear daughter. But now you ask me, I will say that, whenever there is any occasion to speak of him, there can be no danger in doing so, for it shows only that you cherish his memory as you ought. But I think it would be better to speak of him without such words and sighs as show the kind of love that clings to bodily presence. And when you speak of him, instead of saying *feu mon mari* (my late husband), I should say 'My husband on whose soul God have mercy!' And say it with a loving sentiment that time has done nothing to weaken, but that a superior love has freed and purified."

The victory was won. M^me^ de Chantal not only

saw Monsieur d'Anlezy, but eighteen months later became godmother to his infant son.

Mme de Chantal had always helped and visited the poor and sick, but her charity now blossomed into that divine love which becomes a consoling and respectful tenderness towards the suffering members of Jesus Christ. Monthelon, and her own property of Bourbilly, afforded her plenty of scope for her charity. In 1606 she was at the latter place for the vintage, and an epidemic breaking out during her visit, she stayed seven weeks doing everything she could for the dead and dying; and all with an amount of self-abnegation and heroic contempt of her natural disgusts and repugnances that might shock the refinement of the present day, but which God alone could have inspired.

All this time she was indefatigable in educating her children; and in this task was perfectly admirable, a model of firmness, vigilance, and love, that any mother might benefit by studying. While preparing them to take their places as members of society, she kept always in view the life that is to come hereafter, and made this the key-note of their education.

But not even all these well-fulfilled duties satisfied St Francis. She was devoted, mortified, gentle, but there was still a crowning grace to be acquired, one he constantly recommended to those he directed: the grace of *joy*. "Live joyously and be generous," he wrote to her. "God, whom we love, and to whom we are consecrated, wants this of us."[1]

[1] Letter, 30th August 1605.

"You would not, for the whole world, offend God; and is not that enough to make you rejoice?"[1] "If men think well of you, ridicule them joyfully; if ill, comfort yourself joyfully for it."[2] "Be joyous in serving God, I beseech you; joyous without forgetting yourself, confident without being arrogant."[3]

There is not much difficulty in understanding that this joyfulness might be an easy practice to a soul basking in the sunshine of spiritual consolation, while "night is as the day," and mortifications and sacrifice filled with sweetness; but how is it to be practised when day is as night; when temptation rages in the soul; when scruples are torturing it; when the whole spiritual life is a barren desert without sensible love of God, and prayer, meditation, every act of daily life has become painful efforts to a heart cold as marble? Trials of this kind, M^me^ de Chantal had in common with other Saints; they shook her, rent her very soul. And St Francis knew it, yet laid greater and greater stress on his favourite counsel just in the degree it seemed impossible to fulfil it. But he taught his spiritual daughter to distinguish between the affective and effective elements of the soul, a distinction on which he insists in the *Traité de l'Amour de Dieu*. The *affective* are involuntary, irresponsible, fluctuating; the *effective* reside in the will, and are always capable, by God's grace, of remaining fixed and stablished in order, and as the consequence of this are

[1] Letter, 24th June 1604. [2] Letter, 1st Nov. 1605.
[3] Letter, 20th July 1607.

capable always of acts of renunciation of self-will. Now the consequence of such acts is interior peace; the peace that produces a joy that no trouble, darkness, or desolation that dominates the inferior part of the soul can touch.

"Don't be anxious," he writes to her, "everything is going on very well. Darkness, yes, but we are very near the light all the same. Powerlessness, yes, but we lie at the feet of One All Powerful."[1] "Remember it is a good sign when the devil makes a great noise and tempest around our wills. It is a sign that he is not inside. And take courage, dear soul; while we can say with firm resolution, whether we feel it or not, *Vive Jesus* (may Jesus live), there is nothing to fear. And don't tell me that it seems to you, you say it like a coward, with no strength, no courage, but as doing violence to yourself. O God! but that is just the point. This is the holy violence that bears the kingdom of Heaven away. It is a sign, my daughter, that everything has been taken in our fortress by the enemy, except the impenetrable, impregnable donjon, which nothing but *itself* can take. This is that free will which, naked before God, dwells in the supreme and most spiritual part of the soul, and depends only on God and itself; and when every other faculty of the soul is lost and subject to the enemy, it remains solitary and mistress of itself. But notice this: while temptation is displeasing to you, there is nothing to fear; for why should it displease you if not because you would

[1] Letter, 29th June 1606.

like to be rid of it? As for the rest, all these importunate temptations come from the malice of the devil, but the pain and suffering they cause us come from the mercy of God, who, contrary to the will of His enemy, draws out of his malice that holy tribulation which refines the gold God desires to store in His Heavenly Treasury. Despise temptations, embrace tribulations." [1]

Side by side with these temptations from an exterior source, there was that unrestful anxiety which comes from over-scrupulousness and exaggerated self-dissatisfaction, and which is one of the attendant torments of excessive self-analysis in the spiritual life. M^me^ de Chantal "was sick with this sickness," which even her saintly director confesses to her he knows from personal experience. "There is something in me," she says, "which has never been satisfied, but I could not say what it is." He answers in his own graceful way, "I wish I knew that I might tell you." He suggests, however, that this "*unsatisfied*" state has perhaps its origin in a multiplicity of desires pressing on her mind and forming "obstructions." Then he speaks of the disproportion there must always be between her aspirations towards God, her yearnings for holiness and for everything that is best, and her capacity for realising her ideals. He compares her to a bird fastened to a perch, trying to fly away into space and always pulled back by its chain, or to one whose wings are unfledged and who discovers its own "powerlessness

[1] Letter, 14th February 1605.

by attempting to fly." And "since, my dear daughter, you have not wings yet to fly with, and your own powerlessness sets a barrier to all your efforts, don't beat your wings, don't be in a hurry; be patient. I am very much afraid you are just a little bit too eager for the prey. You see how beautiful the light is, you feel the sweetness of your resolutions, they seem almost in your grasp; you are so near what is best that its very proximity excites your appetite, and this appetite keeps urging you on but to no purpose; for when you make a spring forwards, it is only to find, either that the master has you fastened to your perch, or that your wings are not feathered. Go on making your attempts, but with moderation, not beating your wings, not putting yourself into a heat, and be quite pleased that you cannot fly." [1]

He puts her on her guard against the subtle kind of self-examination which is productive of endless "tangles" as he calls them, and which exposes the soul to the risk of losing sight of the Divine Object of its thoughts and actions, by dint of analysing how it thinks and how it acts. "Don't philosophise over your own imperfection. Women, and men too, sometimes, are a great deal too fond of such reflections, and it only tangles thoughts, fears and desires in one another, until the soul is so immeshed that it cannot recover itself.[2] . . . When some trifling thing comes into your mind, it gets disturbed and begins to fear that the trifle will be a hindrance.

[1] Letter, 21st November 1604.
[2] Letter, 6th August 1606.

The mind loses some of its strength through this fear; it is displeased with itself for being afraid, and fears that this fear will do it some harm; so one fear begets another. So you entangle yourself; you fear your fear, then fear the fear of fear; you are disturbed by being disturbed, then disturbed at being disturbed by being disturbed."[1]

But St Francis knew human nature too well to suppose that this advice, true, sensible, acute as it was, would act like a charm. In spite of herself, she would be unable to free herself altogether from this "entanglement of mind," and she must therefore learn to accept it as a form of trial, as a Cross to be united to the Cross of the Saviour, and on this, as the chief point, he finally insists: "What should we care whether it be through fields or deserts that our road lies, if only God be with us? Pray to the Father to comfort you; and having done so, if He be not pleased to do so, don't think about it any more; brace yourself up to work out your salvation on the Cross as if you were to stay always on it. Think to yourself what you would do were you certain you never should be delivered from your anguish; and what would you do? You would say to God: I am yours; if my distress is pleasing to you, give me more and more of it and for longer and longer."[2]

This was his advice when first he began to direct her, and seven years later he was still teaching her the same lesson: "Let us lift up our hearts, my very dear mother; let us look at the Heart of our God, all goodness, all loving, towards us; let us

[1] Letter, 7th March 1608. [2] Letter, 13th Feb. 1605.

adore and bless all His Will; may it cut and trim us how and where it shall please Him."[1] Only a few months before he died, he still was saying the same thing to her: "O how blessed are those souls who live on the Will of God alone! What blessedness to make our every affection humbly subject to the one holy affection of the most pure Love. And the very glory of that holy Love is to burn and consume that which is other than itself, to reduce and convert all into itself. It exalts itself on our nothingness, reigns on the throne of our service."[2]

The chief peril that attends the soul that aspires to the highest altitudes of the spiritual life, is pride; the contrary virtue is therefore the very rampart of the soul, the very foundation of the spiritual life. The edifice of the spiritual rises stage upon stage, but humility must be at the foundation of each of these successive stages. To use a paradox, the interior life rises only in self abasement, and when the very highest point of all is reached then is the self abasement deepest. St Francis, of course, knew all this; but it may perhaps be asked whether he was exactly the right person to help M^me^ de Chantal—for whom, from the first, he had conceived an esteem that had soon developed into veneration—to attain this condition of humility and self abasement. To think humbly of himself was a matter of no difficulty to him; but while with delight and admiration he watched his beloved daughter's progress in the path of perfection, how could he teach her to think of herself except as he thought of her?

[1] Letter, 12th August 1613. [2] Letter, 22nd October 1622.

To begin with he did not, as he would have said, "philosophise" upon the subject. He went to work in a practical manner. M^me^ de Chantal had asked him for some advice about what she called "the much to be desired virtue of humility." This request was made in the first year she knew him, and he wrote her a letter on the subject which she always made the rule of her life, in regard to humility; the virtue, as he calls it, *proper to widows*. "What reason for pride has a widow? Her integrity is incomplete; she has lost that which in the eyes of the world gave her esteem; her husband, who was her honour, whose name she has taken, is no more. What has she left to glory in but in God? In the garden of the Church, widows are compared to violets; little lowly flowers, their colour not very brilliant, nor their odour very pungent, but marvellously sweet. Oh how beautiful a flower is the Christian widow! Widows, who are widows in heart and mind, are honourable indeed; and what does widow mean, but destitute, deprived: that is, miserable, poor, wretched? But this means those that are humble. Now Christian humility does not consist in the acknowledgment of this poverty and wretchedness . . . but in the love of it, and in the contemplation of our Lord's humility. Do you know yourself to be a poor, miserable little widow? Love this miserable condition, let your glory be in your nothingness, be glad of it since your misery gives God, in His goodness, something to exercise His mercy upon.[1] Come, then, let us advance on our

[1] Letter, 1st November 1605.

way by the lowly valleys of humble little virtues."[1] Elsewhere, when charging her not to worry herself over her interior troubles, he speaks of humility as a help. "You are troubled in spirit—and would it not be a very wonderful thing if a poor little widow were anything else but weak and miserable? What kind of spirit do you expect? A spirit of great perspicacity, a strong, self-sustaining spirit? Accept the spirit that suits your condition."

He does not, however, allude so often to humility as to many other virtues in writing to her; from which we may conclude that these early lessons were seed planted in good soil, and that seeing his spiritual daughter steadily following in the footsteps of Him who is *humble of heart*, he felt there was no necessity for constantly repeating his instructions.

Humility was indeed a striking feature in St Chantal all through her life. It was her humility which made her so docile to his spiritual guidance, so simple, prompt, unquestioning in her obedience to him, so responsive to his every hint. It was her humility that made her so utterly candid in exposing her spiritual condition to him in all its successive stages.

These successive stages are what spiritual writers call *states of prayer*; that is, all that takes place in the soul while occupied in prayer. Prayer, they teach, has various degrees, from the elementary one in which the mind, assisted by Divine grace, makes use of its faculties—the understanding with its discursive powers, the imagination with its powers of

[1] Letter, 13th September 1605.

representation—and employs them, first to meditate on a certain truth, then to excite and apply the affections the truth ought to arouse—to the very highest state of prayer in which the soul neither reasons, nor speaks, nor reflects, nor makes distinct acts of thought or feeling, and only holds itself in the presence of God, united to Him, lost in Him, desiring only that His Will be done in itself and all other creatures. But, different as are these states, they have a common object, the same spirit inspires them. They may, in fact, be called the Martha and the Mary of prayer; but the higher state, the "better part," has no character of absolute permanence; nor is the soul capable of either attaining or retaining it—it should even not make any effort to do so. It should simply receive it when and as it comes, as a Divine favour, that may at any moment be withdrawn.

St Chantal was afterwards to attain to such perfection in this state, that we are told, in the midst of all the occupations of her life of constant activity, she lived in "perpetual prayer," and this continued until she died. As early as 1607, a pious, but not very prudent, Carmelite nun had tried to urge her prematurely into the state of contemplative prayer. But St Francis, with his invariable prudence, led her back to the elementary stage and to common practices, and not without a suggestion of humility.

"Perhaps," he wrote to her, "those who have already climbed high up the Mount of Perfection do not require to use the imagination and understanding. But for us who are still down below

in the valleys (and only want to mount), I think it expedient to use all the means at our disposal, including our imagination." [1]

This, to adopt his own language, was keeping the bird chained to the perch. But though it might still be necessary to guard against some covert danger to humility, the soul's flight was not to be for ever restrained; it was not to linger in the valleys when God Himself called it to the top of the mountain.

His spiritual daughter had properly begun with Martha, but at the right moment, he wrote to her: "Why will you practice Martha's part if God Himself has made you understand that it is His will you should practice that of Mary? Your mode of prayer, the simple handing over of yourself to God, is very holy, very salutary. Do not doubt this again. It has been so often examined, and each time the same conclusion has been arrived at, that in this manner our Lord wants you to pray. So all you have to do is to continue in it sweetly and gently."

But she had been kept in the world long enough now to learn the virtue of utter renunciation of herself and her own will, long enough for the edification of others; and he was about to take her by the hand and lead her to that higher state of life in which she would be able to *dispossess* herself of all she was, and all she had to give it to God.

[1] Letter, April 1608.

II

FOUNDATION OF THE VISITATION

When the Bishop of Geneva undertook the spiritual direction of M^me^ de Chantal, their common purpose was her sanctification in the world. Not till a year later did the idea of a religious vocation begin to enter into their conversations. She first broached the subject, uttering some vague aspiration of the kind. He answered her with the gravity of one speaking under a superior inspiration: "Yes, the day will come when you will leave all things. You will come to me, and I will show you how to dispossess yourself of everything for the sake of God." There, for the time, the matter ended. The duty of the moment was, the Bishop taught, the thing to be attended to; to lose oneself in conjectures of things that might happen in the future was sheer waste of time, the future not being in our control. "Nothing," he said, "so hinders us from becoming perfect according to our state, as the longing for some other state." It may have been that he thought the time not yet ripe for M^me^ de Chantal to leave her children; she had not yet completed their education. But whatever the reason, her confidence certainly produced no change in his manner of direction. She wrote to him about her vocation again a few months later, and then he answered: "I will say nothing to you. I do not want to speak. May God enlighten you and show you His pleasure; for we will risk all we are, if

necessary, to follow Him wherever He may take us."[1]

In the following year she pressed him again for an answer, for the idea evidently had taken deep hold of her, and he wrote: "Well, then, I will tell you something about myself—I believe I think of it more than you do." But that is all he says about it, and then he advises her to be "resigned in her diligence."[2]

About this time a Carmelite convent was founded in Dijon, and M^me^ de Chantal, who used to visit the nuns, formed such an admiration of the Order that she began to think her vocation was there. St Francis, however, on being consulted, answered very cautiously, and then told her again that the day would come when she would leave *everything*. "But whether it be to enter religion is an important matter; I am not of that opinion yet. Give me time and leisure to pray more and get others to pray for this intention. And besides, before I can make up my mind, I must have an exhaustive talk with you, and that, please God, will be next year."[3]

He kept her waiting a whole year after this. Then he told her to come and see him at Whitsuntide (1607), at Annecy. Here, for the four or five days the visit lasted, they met often, and the "exhaustive talk" was multiplied into many—she on her side availing herself of the opportunity to give him an exact account of her spiritual state, and to steep herself in the resolution to do whatever God might ask; he

[1] Letter, 3rd October 1605. [2] Letter, 9th May 1606.
[3] Letter, 6th August 1606.

on his, finding her utterly indifferent as to what he might be going to order her to do, told her his secret. He wanted to make use of her to found a congregation, nameless as yet, which, in two important points, was to be a new departure in the religious life.

The first of these was that, to make it accessible to widows and virgins whom age or infirmities incapacitated from entering any of the orders already existing (such as the Poor Clares, or Carmelites), the rule was not to prescribe any great corporal austerities. Mortifications of a kind within everyone's reach were to take the place of these austerities; mortification of spirit, heart, will. Defects were to be overcome, virtues acquired by the attraction of love rather than by the severity of penance; interior recollection, rather than a multiplicity of prayers, was to be practised; *disappropriation* rather than poverty, charity than solitude, obedience than difficult observances.[1]

The second point was that the Sisters were to devote a portion of each day to the service of the sick; to combine, by this means, the vocation of Martha with that of Mary, the merits of the active with those of the contemplative life. Enclosure, with regard to entrance from outside, was to be observed as strictly as in other orders, but the Sisters were to go in and out of the Convent to serve the sick. The founder called this *demi-enclosure*. His idea of religious visiting the sick had perhaps been partly suggested by M^me^ de

[1] *Vie de St F. de Sales*, Hamon, vol. ii., p. 2.

Chantal's wonderful devotion to the poor and suffering in the earlier years of her widowhood in Burgundy. At any rate, he attached such importance to the innovation — for it was one in the France of that day—that he had at first intended to put the Congregation under the patronage of St Martha. But M^me^ de Chantal had the happier inspiration of calling it by the very expressive name it still bears, "The Visitation of St Mary."

Three more years went by before the plan, that was being slowly and carefully matured, was put into effect. M^me^ de Chantal meantime was occupied by her maternal duties. Her eldest daughter's marriage with the Baron de Thorens, our Saint's young brother, had been arranged and carried out; another daughter was still with her and would stay with her wherever she went; and her son, now of an age to need a father's hand, was to be put under the care of his mother's father and her brother, the Archbishop. Monsieur Fremyot, broken-hearted at the idea of losing his daughter, made the sacrifice generously. "Since God wishes, in this world, to have my daughter for His service," he said, "that He may lead her by this road to eternal glory, I hope to be able to prove that her happiness with my conscience at rest, is more to me than my own affections."[1]

And so at last she went to Annecy, and began her year's noviciate under the guidance of St Francis. Several other ladies, whom a similar attraction and the same guiding hand had brought

[1] Letter to St F. de Sales, 29th March 1610.

from different parts of France and Savoy, became her companions. The house they lived in was a humble little abode known as the "Gallery House," a name still honoured in the annals of the Congregation.

It would be pleasant to linger among the portraits in this "Gallery," portraits of women differing in character, but drawn together by a common attraction, and united in a holy bond of mutual love and of a common veneration for M^me^ de Chantal, who, as might be expected, became the model and central figure of the order. We refrain, however, from mentioning so much as the names of these first mothers: it would be impossible to make selections where all were on a par of virtue, and, to name them all, and give an account of each, would be to begin another book at the end of the present one.

To this little flock our Saint henceforward dedicated all that was best and noblest in his writings as well as thoughts; especially in the *Entretiens* (conversations), which his daughters carefully preserved in a collected form. For them also he wrote, or chiefly wrote, his *Traité de l'Amour de Dieu*; and perhaps were we asked to suggest a method of learning the exact meaning of the expression "progress in sanctity," we could suggest none better than that of thoughtfully reading every passage in our Saint's collected works that has any reference to the humble little Order which, even in the founder's lifetime, developed into thirteen foundations.

There is, however, one episode in connection with

the Foundation of the Visitation of which some account must be given, both as a remarkable instance of the founder's intense humility, and because of the far reaching consequences which, read in the light of after events, it appears to have had, under the over-ruling hand of Providence.

Four years had passed over the house at Annecy, when there came from Lyons to visit it four devout widows; their object being, as they expressed it, "to spy out the land and see if it were the one God intended to give them," for they felt an attraction to the religious life.

Delighted with all they saw and heard, they went back to Lyons, and eventually succeeded in obtaining from Mgr. de Marquemont, the Cardinal Archbishop, the necessary authorisation for the foundation of a second monastery of the Visitation in his metropolitan city. St Francis thereupon sent Mother de Chantal, and some of her companions, to make the foundation; but, scarcely was it canonically established, when the Archbishop unexpectedly forbade the Sisters to leave their convent to visit the sick, imposed strict enclosure on them, and ordered them to change the name to that of the Presentation, the title of the Visitation being no longer appropriate.

This was tantamount to a reversal of the original scheme. Mother de Chantal, in great distress, advised the Bishop of Geneva to stand firm, and from Rome came to him encouraging letters from Cardinal Bellarmine. Memorials were exchanged between the two prelates, then a personal interview took

place, but all to no avail. Mgr. de Marquemont remained inflexible, and hinted that, should the proposed changes not be accepted, he would close the house; being, he said, as much master at Lyons as the Bishop of Geneva was at Annecy. And then St Francis yielded: first of all because he was afraid of being too confident in his own judgment; secondly, out of respect for the Archbishop's dignity and authority; thirdly, because he was anxious not to check the expansion of the Order in France, where he hoped it would take root and spread. The sacrifice was made very simply and without a trace of anything like resentment, both by the founder and by his spiritual daughters, whom he inspired with his own spirit of perfect self-renunciation. But Mgr. de Belley tells us that some time afterwards, the Bishop said to him with a smile: "People call me the founder of the Visitation; but was anything ever so contrary to reason? I did what I did not want to do, and undid what I did want."

Modern developments of the religious life have justified his scheme and proved the Archbishop wrong. On every side are congregations of women devoting their lives to the alleviation of suffering in all its forms; nor has this development been in any way detrimental to the enclosed orders, which remain as fruitful as ever in vocations. But it would be rash to conclude from these facts that St Francis was wrong in yielding to the Archbishop, or that the detachment from self which yielded under such circumstances was a mistake. If a mistake, it was one

of those mistakes of the saints which God makes use of to carry out His own designs.

The original scheme for the Visitation would have corresponded no doubt to a want of the age. Devoted women might there have satisfied a very legitimate desire to combine the perfection of the interior life with active social charity. The interference of Mgr. de Marquemont deprived them of this possibility; the want was still unsupplied.

At this very time there was in Paris a certain humble priest, whose acquaintance St Francis made, but not very long before his own death. This priest was he whom the world now knows as St Vincent of Paul, and, like Francis, he was called to found a religious order. This order was in the Divine plan destined to fill the void created by the change in the rules of the Visitation. In a word, had the Visitation retained its original form, the Daughters of Charity, or, to give them their popular name, the Sisters of Charity of St Vincent of Paul, might never have been called into existence. The place they fill in the Church's economy would not have been vacant for them to occupy but for the humility of St Francis.

But the Visitation, deprived of exterior work for the poor and sick, is nevertheless still an order devoted to suffering humanity, to the sick in soul and body, by prayer and sacrifice. The original name still retained, is still symbolically appropriate. The spirit is still the founder's spirit, one of love and of the *dispossession of self* as he called it. The arms of the Order are still the prophetic coat of arms he chose for it.

"God has given me the thought," he wrote to M^me^ Chantal, "that by His grace our House of the Visitation is to have its arms, its blazon, its motto, its war-cry. For arms, I have been thinking, then, we ought to take a Heart pierced by two arrows, and enclosed in a Crown of thorns, surmounted by a Cross, and engraved with the sacred names of Jesus and Mary. For in very truth our little congregation is the work of the Heart of Jesus and Mary; *through the opening of His Sacred Heart our Saviour brought us into the world.*"

The Visitation has always been a school of charity and amiability, a school of heroism for generation after generation of devout women. This charity, this amiability, which the founder bequeathed to it as his own spirit, he himself had learnt from the Sacred Heart. And in process of time, when St Francis had been dead more than half a century, the Saviour of the world, yearning to make known to men the promises and longings of His Heart, yearning to tell them of the love of the Sacred Heart, and of the blessing He waits to pour on nations and individual souls who will but give Him their hearts in exchange for His, chose a humble Sister of the Visitation, at Paray-le-Monial, to be the recipient of these Divine revelations; and in this signal favour may we not discern the witness of God Himself to Francis, the Apostle of His Love?

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